

DIAMOND DICK

JR. JR.



BOY'S LIFE WEEKLY

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Diamond Dick's Vengeance;

OR,

THE DEFEAT OF THE DESTROYING ANGEL.

By the author of "DIAMOND DICK."

CHAPTER I.

THE OVERLAND TRAIL.

"Halt!"

The sharp command was repeated again and again down the straggling wagon-train.

"Halt! Halt! Halt!"

"What's the matter?" timidly asked a woman.

"Silence!"

"Is there danger?"

"Don't know yet. Keep quiet."

The woman, who held a baby in her arms, drew back behind the canvas cover and sought to still the wailing of the infant.

As the wife of a prospector, she was accustomed to obeying the men without question.

There were seven wagons in the train, of the kind known as "prairie-schooners," their tops enclosed in sail-cloth drawn over semicircular hoops, and fastened, curtainwise, at back and front.

In the rays of the setting sun, these cloth domelike covers seemed to be transparent, and lighted up redly from within.

But there was no such fancy in the minds of the rugged men who had been for days slowly plowing across the

alkali wastes, on their way to the Nevada gold and silver-mines.

They were strictly matter of fact, as became prospectors willing to face all hardships for the sake of winning a glorious golden victory at last.

The man who had given the order to halt was on the leading wagon.

His cowhide boots were rusty, while the trousers tucked into them were of blue jean, bearing many signs of wear, which description also applies to his brown sack coat and broad-brimmed soft hat.

Like all the men in the party, this prospector, Simon Garvin, carried a .44-caliber Colt six-shooter hanging from a belt, with a hunting-knife in its sheath on the other side.

He was a fine specimen of American manhood in the rough, as he stood defiantly on the foot-board of the wagon.

Shading his eyes with his hand, he was gazing ahead through a pass in the Uintah Mountains.

"What do you think of it, Simon?"

An individual, who looked like the "double" of the person on the wagon, strolled up, with a rather troubled expression on his face.

"Tain't very hopeful, Luke," answered Simon, sha-

king his head. "But don't say nothin', so's ter scare the women."

"I won't."

Simon and Luke Garvin were twins, nearly forty-five years of age, who were journeying together from their old home in Michigan toward the setting sun, as so many sturdy workers had done before them.

Simon's wife, Mary, his eighteen-year-old daughter, Bettina, and the wife of a former Michigander, Jake Lawler, who had done well in Nevada, and who wanted his wife and baby to join him, were in this first wagon.

It was Mrs. Helen Lawler, with her nine-months boy in her arms, who had peeped from the interior and asked if there was any danger.

Simon and Luke had undertaken to get her to Nevada, to her husband, and it was on her account, more than anything else, that Simon was so agitated when he saw peril looming up ahead.

Luke was a bachelor, but a maiden sister—thirty-five years old, with a red nose and shrewish temper—was traveling in the second wagon with him, whence she managed, with dignity, the domestic economy of the whole Garvin family.

The only difficulty she experienced was in making Bettina understand that the niece of eighteen must defer to the aunt of nearly double her years. Bettina had a will of her own.

"Where's Tilly?" asked Simon.

"In the wagon, boiling coffee on the oil-stove."

"Correct! Let her stay there. If once she suspects that there is likely to be trouble with them suspicious fellers ahead, she'll want to get out that old musket of hers, and I'm always afeard it will bust every time it goes off. Tilly is a right good sister, but I wish some one would pinch her fifty-year-old muzzle-loader."

"Here come the boys, Simon," said Luke.

Five men, whose general appearance was that of the Garvin brothers, came up from the other wagons, anxious to know what was the cause of the halt.

"Keep quiet, boys," whispered Luke. "Come down from the wagon, Simon, and let's go into committee."

Simon jumped from the foot-board, and the whole seven moved off into a clump of bushes among the rocks, where they could talk without being overheard by the women and children in the wagons.

"It's all in a nutshell," began Simon. "Up there, in that ravine, where we have to go through, there seems to be about a dozen ugly-looking cusses, waiting to bush-whack us."

"Ambush, eh?" remarked a dried-up specimen of humanity, who had come with the others.

His reputation was that he feared nothing on earth, in spite of his small size, and he looked as if the prospect of a scrap delighted him.

"Call it that if you like, Judge," answered Simon. "I

reckon they are them Destroying Angels from the mountains—the toughest gang of hold-ups in all Utah."

"I'll destroy 'em, if ever I begin to shoot," snapped the little man, who was known as Judge Clark. "I'll give them destroying angel. We chew up such chaps in Lansing, the town I come from. If they had ever been brought before me when I was justice of the peace, I'd have sent them up for thirty days apiece just on their looks, and held them for trial afterward."

"Order, Judge!" put in Luke. "Don't make too many loud breaks. My sister, Tilly, has sharp ears. Besides, some of the other women may hear. We have to get through without trouble from screams, and all that sort of thing, if we can."

"Your point of order is well taken," conceded Judge Clark, with the dignity that he had always maintained when he was "on the bench," as he generally described his justice of the peace experience.

"The best thing to do is to drive ahead as if we were not afraid, I should say," was the suggestion of a fat man from Detroit, named Jack Jolly, who always looked on the bright side of things.

"And run right into that nest of rattlesnakes?"

Simon Garvin said this with a scorn that made poor Jack Jolly wish he had not spoken.

Before there was an opportunity for more to be said, nine masked men, on horseback, who had shown themselves among the rocks just enough for their presence to be known, but had not allowed the travelers in the wagon to observe them in detail, swung into the open, charging straight down upon the wagons.

"Close up, everybody!" ordered Simon, as he held his revolver ready for business.

The wagons were all behind each other, the four mules drawing each vehicle waiting with characteristic patience for whatever might happen.

Suddenly the foremost rider drew a white handkerchief from his pocket and waved it.

"Flag of truce! Humbug!" grunted Judge Clark. "There is no truce with those scoundrels. But I suppose we must respect the white signal. I'll go forward and hear what they have to say."

Before any one could object, the little lawyer ran ahead as fast as he could until he could hear what the fellow on horseback was shouting to him through a rolled-up paper which answered the purpose of a modern megaphone.

"I want to see Simon Garvin!"

"What for?"

"Are you Simon Garvin?"

"Yes," replied Judge Clark, feeling that he would be forgiven for the falsehood for the sake of the good he hoped to do.

"Waal, yer have a girl named Bettina. One o' ther

boys ez knowed her back in Michigan he wants her to come to him."

For a moment Judge Clark did not know what to say, but his mind moved quickly, and he replied, as if the order had been nothing unusual:

"We'll bring her along. We are on our way to the Nevada border, and we will leave her with your friend when we get there."

"Oh, yer will, eh?"

With an oath, the man rushed his horse toward the little lawyer, evidently with the intention of riding him down before he could offer any resistance.

Judge Clark blazed away with his six-shooter, but he was not familiar with the weapon—accurate pistol-shooting not being a common accomplishment in Lansing, Michigan—so that he missed his target with the three shots he fired.

There seemed little hope for Judge Clark, for the stranger was a skilful horseman, and he turned the animal directly toward his intended victim with pitiless insistence.

The small lawyer, nothing dismayed, however, let fly with another shot, and then poised his pistol to hurl it at the head of his enemy, yelling steadily the while:

"You big scalawag! I'm Judge Clark, from Lansing, and we never take a bluff in that town! Get your horse away from me, or I'll——"

But the front hoofs of the animal were already close to him, and, as they knocked him over to one side, the fellow in the saddle tried to bring them down on his chest as he lay.

But at this moment there was some one else in the fray.

From the rocks far over to the right came darting a young cowboy, with long yellow hair flowing over his shoulders, and mounted on a splendid black horse.

At the same instant the masked ruffian who was about to trample Judge Clark to death reeled in his saddle and pitched headlong to earth!

There had been no shot, but some mysterious stroke had killed him!

The other masked men in the draw let fly with their revolvers at the young fellow in his flannel shirt and buckskin "chaps," who was riding so gallantly toward the wagon.

They associated him with the downfall of their pal, although they had not seen him do anything, and certainly he had no weapon in his hand.

The pistol-shots of the villains were all ineffective, and the cowboy rode on until he reached Judge Clark, who was scrambling to his feet, covered with dust and as mad as a wet tom-cat.

"Hurt, Judge?" asked the cowboy cheerily.

"Hello, Diamond Dick! No. I ain't hurt. But some of those scoundrels with the masks on will think they

have been through a bargain-counter rush before I get through with them!"

Diamond Dick gave a hand to the irate little lawyer, and lifted him, by main strength, to the front of his saddle.

They dashed across the open, leaving the dead man lying by the side of his horse, until they reached the group of men gathered about the wagons, from which the white faces of women peered, wondering what the firing was about.

Running his horse behind the first vehicle, to be sheltered from the shots of the enemy if they should keep on firing, Dick crawled into the wagon at the rear, telling all the other men to follow.

"What's the idee, Dick?" asked Simon.

"If they attack us, we must have our fighting force massed. That is all," answered Dick. "The women and children are safer in the rear wagons."

"Then shall Mary and I and Helen and the baby go into one of the other wagons?" asked a pretty girl, with blond hair and dark-blue eyes, who was standing in the first one, gazing inquiringly at Dick.

"No, Bettina. You will be safer here," put in the lawyer. "Most of this racket is about you, and we want you where we can see what you are doing—or, rather, make sure those pestilent creatures over there are not harming you in any way."

"You are right, Judge," agreed Dick. "I am going in front to parley with the enemy."

"Mind they don't plug you, Dick," warned Simon.

"No fear of that," replied Dick carelessly, as he pushed the front curtains apart and stepped upon the foot-board.

The eight masked horsemen had reined up some distance away, but near enough to hear his voice in the still air of the evening.

"Stay where you are," shouted Dick, as he came into view, his hands down by his side, as if he disdained to threaten the men with a weapon.

"Who are you?" demanded one of the strangers.

"I am Diamond Dick. You are Hezekiah Pine, leader of the Destroying Angels," replied Dick, quick as a flash.

There was a movement among the horsemen, as they turned their heads toward each other, which assured Dick that his shot had told, and that he had guessed correctly.

"We have been appointed to find something belonging to us, now in the possession of one Simon Garvin. We are going to make an investigation," said the individual whom Dick had named as Hezekiah Pine. "Do not interfere, if you value your life."

It was noticed that Pine used good language and spoke in a rather refined tone.

He rode forward a few yards, but stopped, as he saw Dick's hand move to the butt of the six-shooter in his holster.

"Don't you dare!" warned the masked leader.

"Dare?" cried Dick scornfully, as he pointed to the mysteriously stricken man lying by the side of his horse. "You see what has happened to him. It will be so with all your band if you lay a hand on any of these wagons."

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD FRIEND REAPPEARS.

Dick waited a moment to see whether the men would continue to advance, and then, as they did not move, he called softly to those within the wagons to be ready with their rifles, and to pour in a volley as the masked men came on—if they did charge.

But his threat seemed to have frightened the enemy.

The leader did not speak to Dick again, but, sitting motionless while apparently he considered the situation, he waved the white flag once more, and galloped back to his comrades.

"What do you think that means?" queried the little lawyer, peering between the curtains.

"I don't know yet."

"Scared, ain't they?"

"I don't think so. They are only waiting to make up their minds what to do. Ah! Here is Hezekiah riding forward again."

Judge Clark now had a Marlin rifle in his hand, while the other men were all armed, but they kept out of sight.

Diamond Dick, on the foot-board, was the only person to be seen by the Destroyers, and he stood there, steady as a rock, waiting to be addressed.

"Diamond Dick!" cried Hezekiah.

"What is it?"

"We want to pick up our pard, lying over there."

"Very well. But don't try any treachery, or I will give the signal, and the silent death from the rocks which struck him will visit you. Don't make any mistake."

"All right," answered Hezekiah, waving his arms to his men in the rear to join him.

"Only three must come," warned Dick.

"All right!"

The masked stranger made a certain sign with his fingers, and all of his band except three remained motionless, while the trio selected galloped to the place where the horse stood by the side of his dead rider.

Skilfully the four strangers picked up the remains of the man who had been killed in so unusual a manner and laid them across the saddle, tying them securely with the riata that hung coiled at the saddle-horn.

Dick watched the proceedings quietly, alert for any treachery.

Having secured the body on the horse, the four men

started the animal toward the pass, where their four associates were waiting.

Five minutes later the whole party—eight live men and one dead one—had vanished through the opening in the mountains, just as the gray gloom of night settled over the valley.

Judge Clark—whose appearance was distinct from that of all the other travelers, by reason of the black frock coat and open waistcoat which he could not bring himself to discard, although the remainder of his attire was like that of the others, even to the belt, with its six-shooter and bowie-knife—joined Dick on the foot-board.

"What do you think, Dick? Have we driven them off?" asked the little lawyer.

"No."

"No? You think they will come back again?"

"Judge, did you ever hear of these so-called Destroying Angels giving up a scheme of villainy they had once formed? We dare not go any farther to-night, or we shall certainly be set upon."

"And if we remain where we are?"

"We can at least fight with some chance on our side," answered Dick, turning to the interior of the wagon.

He found everybody waiting for a report from him as to the situation, but all confident that he would be able to take them through safely.

"How did you kill that rascal over there, Dick? I did not see you shoot him."

"I did not shoot him," answered Dick calmly.

"But you seemed to have something to do with it," remarked Luke.

"I had."

"It's a queer thing. I wish you'd explain. I'm losing flesh trying to figure it out," declared the fat Jack Jolly.

"I will explain," laughed Dick. "There is no danger just now, so you may as well come out of the wagon and let the ladies prepare supper. Then I'll tell you all about it."

There was a hasty piling out of all the men at the back, except Judge Clark and Dick, who made their exit in front.

As they met by the side of the wagon, each man, with the exception of Diamond Dick, armed with the Winchester he had picked up inside the wagon, the general attention was attracted to a small individual, on a large hammer-headed white horse, who was galloping toward them from the rocks on the right whence Dick had come a short time before.

"Billy Doo!" explained Dick, as if introducing the newcomer.

"What? Billy Doo, from Lame Dog?" asked Simon Garvin eagerly.

"The same," answered Dick. "I left word at Lame Dog that he and my other pard, Handsome Harry, were

to get on our trail as soon as they arrived in town, and I am glad to say they are here."

"Hi, Dick! Wot's de game? Where's dem guys wit' de hoodwinks on?"

It was Billy Doo, the fifteen-year-old lad who had been Diamond Dick's companion through many a perilous adventure, but who had been East with Handsome Harry for some weeks, on business, and had just returned.

A word of description of Billy Doo, for the benefit of those who do not know him, may not be amiss.

He was a chunky lad, with sharp black eyes, a turned-up nose, and curly black hair, on which set rakishly a white "Stetson."

Billy Doo dressed exactly like Diamond Dick, the dashing young scout, cowboy, and United States marshal, and his ambition was to be like Dick in every possible way.

His hammer-headed horse was an angular creature, with a temper to match, and Billy Doo had named him Tammany.

"Come on, Billy," shouted Dick, as the boy swept up to the group. "Tell us what killed that rascal who has just been carried away."

"Dis!" answered the lad, as he held up a small contrivance of leather and two thick rubber bands. "Dis is de joker dat stopped his clock. I kin do it nine times out o' ten, an' never toin a hair."

"What is it, my lad?" asked Judge Clark patronizingly.

"Aw! Fergit it wit' 'my lad,' Jedge," squeaked Billy. "My name's Billy Doo—or William Doolittle, when I signs me full John Hancock on checks an' udder important dockyments. Nix wit' 'my lad,' ef youse wants ter stand in wit' your'n trooly."

"I beg your pardon, Billy," responded Judge Clark, rather pleased that Billy had recognized him as a "judge."

"De 'pology is all ter de curlin'-irons," said Billy. "Don't say no more. On'y it gits on me noives when a guy don't call me right. Ez fer dat mug wot passed it up over dere, why, I kin do any one wit' de joker. Look here an' make a note."

Billy had slipped from his horse, and was holding up his implement, which proved to be an exceedingly powerful catapult.

Placing in it a good-sized stone, he pulled the rubber bands to their utmost and let go.

There was a twang, and the stone sped away so fast that it could not be seen.

"Dat's wot," observed Billy, in a satisfied tone. "It's gittin' dark now, but in de daylight, I kin hit de head of a nail in a barn door at eighty yards, jest ez troo ez I kin wit' a bullet f'um my gun."

"I begin to see now," declared the lawyer.

"Dat's a good t'ing. Wot wuz it youse wuz tryin' ter make out?" asked Billy solicitously.

"I wondered what had killed that man in the mask."

"It was Billy's catapult," interposed Diamond Dick.

"I saw the fellows riding on, evidently nearing to attack the wagons, and I directed Billy to let fly at him when I gave him a certain signal."

"Dat's wot. I got de sign f'um Dick, an' de sharp stone wot I'd picked out fer de work caught Mr. Mask right in de temple. Dat wuz all dey wuz ter dat," added Billy.

"It ain't many kids as can use one of those slung-shots so sure as that, I'm thinking," remarked Luke.

"Dey's on'y one, an' I'm him," was Billy Doo's assertion, as he cinched up Tammany's saddle.

"Where is Handsome Harry?" asked Dick, turning to the boy.

"De Sarp? He's over dere behind de rocks, waitin' till youse send fer him. Poor ol' guy! I told him dat ef he come snoopin' over here afore he wuz told he w'u'd be sure ter sp'il wotever game you wuz woikin', an' he's jest lingerin' like a lily on de stem fer——"

"Call him over, Billy," interrupted Dick.

"Sure!"

Billy Doo mounted his white horse again, and galloped off in a cloud of dust toward the rocks from which he had emerged.

"Didn't that boy call Handsome Harry Sarp? What did he mean?" asked Judge Clark.

Diamond Dick laughed.

"It's a nickname. You'll probably understand why it is used when you see Handsome Harry."

There was a call to supper from the interior of the second wagon, where Tilly Garvin had been busy with her coffee and ham and eggs during all the bustle, and everybody except Dick and the Garvin twins made a bolt for the other wagons, where they expected to find their own meals prepared.

Dick, Simon, and Luke were in the habit of eating their meals together under Aunt Tilly's supervision, together with Helen Lawler, her baby, and Mary Garvin, Bettina's mother.

Hardly had the party got fairly settled in the wagon, which was furnished with a long bench down either side, and a portable table in the middle on which the meal was set, when there came a whooping outside that Diamond Dick knew proceeded from the lungs of his young pard, Billy Doo.

"What is it, Billy?" shouted Dick, opening the front curtains.

"Dem guys in de masks hez got de Sarp!" answered Billy excitedly.

"What's that?" asked Judge Clark, appearing suddenly from one of the rear wagons.

"It seems as if those scalawags have captured Handsome Harry," replied Dick savagely, through his set teeth.

CHAPTER III.

ROBBERS IN CAMP AT NIGHT.

"Tell me all about it, Billy," ordered Dick, as Billy Doo came surging up on his white horse.

"Well, dey ain't much ter tell, Dick," answered Billy. "Me an' Tam went ter de place wher' we'd left de Sarp, wit' dat roan horse o' his'n, expectin' ter find him smokin' one o' dem long Mexican cigarros wot he likes——"

"Who was smoking the cigarros—the horse?" asked Jack Jolly, with a wide grin.

Billy Doo turned upon the facetious gentleman from Detroit a look of intense scorn, as he admonished him severely:

"Aw! Cut it out! Nix fer de comic relief. Dis ain't no time fer gittin' off bum jokes."

"Go on, Billy," requested Dick impatiently.

"Well, de Sarp—Handsome Harry—wasn't dere. Dat's all about it, on'y when I give him de long yell, he come back at me wit' a whoop dat told me he wuz on de fritz somewhere, an' I made Tam hike along over de boulders fer nigh a quarter of a mile."

"Then?"

"Den I seed dem guys wit' de disgoozes on dem swingin' lighted lanterns an' drivin' de Sarp among 'em."

"Was he tied or held down in any way?"

"No. Dat's de cur'ous part o' de play," answered Billy. "He wuz ridin' his roan in de middle o' de bunch, wit'out sayin' nuttin', aldough dey had no ropes on him nor nuttin'."

"I suppose they were covering him with their guns," suggested Judge Clark.

"Wot would de Sarp car' fer dat?" sniffed Billy. "Youse don't know Handsome Harry. He ain't de duck ter let no one git de best o' him jest 'cause dey wuz a gun in question—not none."

"Where did they go?" asked Dick.

"Dey seemed to be makin' to'ard de west."

"You could not make out for sure, could you, Billy?"

"Not altergedder. Youse kin see it's gittin' dark, an' it ain't easy ter make out t'ings, even if de sun hezn't gone out o' sight entirely. But, so fur ez I c'u'd mek out, by de light o' dem lanterns, dey wuz makin' purty good time in dat direction."

"Why have they lighted lanterns, I wonder," muttered Dick. "Some trick, of course."

"Wot's dat?" asked Billy.

"They did not seem to be hurting the Sarpint in any way, nor to be threatening him?" asked Dick, ignoring the boy's question.

"I c'u'dn't tell dat, on account o' bein' so fur away an' it gittin' dusk. But f'um wot I c'u'd make out o' de Sarp's movements, I sh'u'd say he wuz givin' dem a piece o' his mind, an' dat dey wuz all listenin' wit' due respect.

It didn't look ter me ez ef de Sarp wuz gittin' de woist o' it, 'cept dat dey wuz takin' him along wit' 'em."

"Come and get your supper, Billy," called out Tilly Garvin, the spinster sister, who had been listening to the conversation from an opening in the canvas cover, and who addressed the lad as if she had known him all her life, although she never had seen him before.

"Sure!" answered Billy. Then, as he saw the red nose and pinched features of the lady, he pretended to fall into a rapture of admiration, as he exclaimed sentimentally: "It is she—de light o' me soul! Gee! Wot grace! Wot loveliness! It's me fer de altar wit' youse! Take me! I'm your'n! Wow!"

"Shut up!" growled Luke menacingly. "Don't get too fresh with ladies of my family."

Billy was leading his hammer-headed white horse to the rear, where he had noticed there was a quantity of hay in a box, with feed in bags, and he was more interested in seeing that Tammany would get proper sustenance than in the scolding of Luke Garvin.

"I don't see why you should talk like that to the boy," said Tilly Garvin, with a toss of her head. "If he admires me, what harm is there in that?"

"Great guns!" muttered Luke.

Billy Doo soon came back to the wagon, after leaving his horse in the care of a lad of his own age, belonging to the prospecting-party, who had general charge of the stock.

"Would you like some buckwheat cakes, Billy?" asked Tilly, with her sweetest smile.

"Would I?" squeaked Billy.

It was not much Billy said, but it was enough, and in two minutes he was seated before a pile of smoking buckwheats, piling in with knife and fork as if he had not eaten anything for a week, while Bettina, Mrs. Lawler, the baby, and Bettina's mother, Mary Garvin, looked on in silent astonishment.

By the time supper was over it was quite dark, and Diamond Dick prepared to make camp for the night.

Under his direction—for he had been tacitly accepted as leader of the wagon-train since he had joined it—the vehicles were formed into a barricade, with the horses and people in the middle.

Dick decided that it would not be safe to sleep in the wagons, now that the outlaws were almost certain to pay them a nocturnal visit, but that every one must lie on the ground or improvised cots, wrapped in blankets, in the center of the protected camp.

There was plenty of work to be done.

Cots for the women and children were formed of boxes and other contents of the wagons, and piles of blanket were brought forth, so that no one would suffer from cold.

The nights in this region are chilly, usually, although the days are warm in the spring, summer, and fall, and

it was well understood that bed-covering was an important adjunct to the camp outfit.

At last all was finished, and the women and children retired, while the men walked about inside the wagons, keeping a sharp lookout, as well as the darkness would allow them, for an attack by the enemy that probably was lurking in the vicinity.

Winchesters were staked in the very center of the small space inside the circle of wagons, and in open boxes there was ammunition enough to stand off an army.

It was a starlight night, but there was no moon. Dick was glad it was not too light.

"Dick," whispered Simon Garvin, stepping up to the side of the young scout when there happened to be no one else near.

"Yes?"

"You ain't going to let those brutes take my girl, are you?"

"Not if it can be helped, and I think it can. We will keep these miserable wretches away from the inside of camp, I have no doubt. But they might get hold of Bettina in the mêlée, you know."

"What is to be done, then?"

"You stand guard over your family," replied Dick.

"But I may be wanted to shoot at the Destroyers if they attack the camp, as you think they will," objected Simon.

"We will get along without you," was Dick's response. "There are plenty of us to guard the wagons, but you are the person to see that no one touches Bettina."

"I suppose you are right. Though I should like to take a shot or two at those rascals."

"You'd better go to Bettina and see that she is safe, Simon," suggested Dick.

"I will."

"Wot am I ter do, Dick?" asked Billy Doo, coming up to the young scout, six-shooter in hand.

"Keep with me, Billy."

"Sure. Dat's wot I wants ter do. But, say, Dick, dat Tilly is a peacherino."

"Miss Tilly Garvin is a nice young woman. I have thought that from the beginning of my acquaintance with her."

"An' dem buckwheat cakes she toins out is all ter de good, too. I got away wit' twenty-eight of 'em," declared Billy, with a grin of satisfaction at the recollection.

"And how do you feel?" asked Dick, somewhat anxiously.

"Out o' sight."

"No heaviness in your—your—chest?"

"Nary a heaviness."

"Billy, you are a wonder!"

Dick smiled, as he looked about him, to see that all was safe, when suddenly there came a combined shout

from what seemed to be twenty men, mingled with a girl's scream.

"This way, Billy!" shouted Dick, as he rushed toward the place where Bettina's cot could be made out dimly in the starlight.

He had not reached it when Simon Garvin staggered toward him, and, as he dropped helpless to the ground, groaned:

"They've got her!"

"Who?" demanded Billy Doo.

"My daughter! My Bettina!"

CHAPTER IV.

DICK POINTS OUT THE WAY.

There was no time to talk, for the galloping of horses could be heard outside the barrier of wagons, and every one in camp had possessed himself of a rifle, waiting for an order to fire.

But Dick realized that the cunning of the men who had stolen Bettina would prevent an immediate attack upon them.

Counting eight men dashing away on horseback, he saw that each one had a long white sheet or garment streaming over his left arm.

These sheets might have been wrapped around the slim form of a young girl for all that Dick could determine in the gloom, and evidently the purpose of the marauders was to make him and his comrades hesitate to fire at them, for fear they might shoot the girl.

"There is only one thing to do, and that is to chase them on horseback. Where is your mount, Billy?"

"Right here, wit' your'n. Bot' on 'em air ready saddled. Dat's de way I took care ter have 'em, 'cause I nachally had a hunch dat dey might be a run fer us."

The lad brought forward the horses as he spoke, and truly never had there been a sharper contrast between the appearance of two animals than was apparent when Tammany, the raw-boned, hammer-headed white steed, stood by the side of Diamond Dick's magnificent black thoroughbred, Major.

"I'm going with you!" put in a weak voice, as Simon Garvin, still staggering, came toward them.

"How was it, Simon?" asked Dick kindly.

"I was just walking over to the place where they were all lying down, after my talk with you," answered Simon, "when I saw three big fellows, their faces covered by black masks and carrying white sheets on their arms, crawling from one of the wagons. They had climbed up on the other side and hidden themselves under the canvas. Then they came out at the front, let themselves down from the foot-board without noise, and darted toward Bettina."

"Well?"

"I made a jump to get there first; but I was too late."

"How was that?"

"One of them struck me on the head with a rock, or something, and down I went. Then I heard Bettina scream."

"Here's the horses, Dick," interposed Billy Doo.

"I'm going, too," shouted Simon. "You are going to follow them, I suppose?"

"That depends on circumstances," answered Dick, as he moved one of the wagons aside, to make room for the passage of the horses.

Hardly had Dick done this, when a very tall individual, who, even in the dim light of the stars, was seen to be dressed in the attire of a cattleman, with a bushy beard and long hair, stalked through the gap.

"Hully chee!" gasped Billy Doo.

"Handsome Harry?" cried Dick.

"Shore!" answered the big newcomer. "In co'se I'm Handsome Harry, ther ol' Sarpint o' Siskiyou, wi' seventeen rattles an' a button! Moreover, I'm aimin' ter mek them thar coyotes, wi' ther black things on thar faces, recognize ther fact thet I'm ther great he grizzly o' ther Uintah Mountains, wi' death in my gaze an' everlastin' perdition in ther weight o' my arm! Thar is on'y one thing I needs afore I kin feel perfect peace, an' thet is ter crack ther heads o' all them eight tarrapins by knockin' them tergether in twos. Arter thet— Look hyar, yer grinnin' ape!" he roared suddenly, to Billy Doo, "gi' me a drink o' water, or I'll shore strike fire wi' my teeth agin' ther roof o' my mouth, I'm so dry!"

At any other time Billy Doo would have resented this kind of address from Handsome Harry; but now he saw that his big friend was overwrought by some experience through which he had just passed, and he made no comment on the exceedingly impolite language in which he had been addressed.

"Here's de juice, Sarp," he said, as he brought a tin mug full of water from one of the barrels in which the refreshing liquid was carried by the pilgrims. "Cool yerse'f down."

Handsome Harry was six feet four inches in his boots, and wide in proportion, and he had a voice like the roar of the Bull of Bashan, especially when excited.

His large beard and long hair were a fiery red, which may have had something to do with the violence of his temper when aroused.

"How did you come to be with those rascals, Sarpint?" asked Dick, when his gigantic pard had quenched his thirst.

"I wuz 'cause they lied ter me," answered Handsome Harry. "They run up ter whar I wuz, covered me wi' thar guns, an' said thet they hed you a prisoner, an' thet they wuz tekin' yer ter ther camp."

"Go on."

"They said thet ef I w'uld go thar an' sw'ar you wuz ther original Di'mond Dick, ther United States marshal, they would let yer go an' 'pologize ez waal."

"What did they mean?"

"They insinooated thet you wuz a imposter, purtendin' ter be Di'mon' Dick when yer wuzn't, an'——"

"But why don't we go after them?" broke in Simon Garvin. "They are taking my girl away while we are talking here."

The father was nearly beside himself with grief and terror over the carrying off of Bettina, and Dick placed his hand soothingly on Simon's arm.

"Be patient, Simon. The Sarpint can give us information which will help us to get her back. Let us hear him first."

"But, my child! I——"

"Thet's so," said Handsome Harry, sympathy trembling in his big voice. "But we'll hev ter go about it keerfully, pard. Thar's no use in us gents tekin' it on ther run. Let me finish my yarn. At ther same time, I'll gi' yer my word ez a spo't an' a cow gent, thet we ain't wastin' no time whut c'u'd be profitably used ter rescoo this hyar lovely maiden whut you is lucky enough ter be ther father o'. Savvy?"

"Back up, Sarp!" put in Billy Doo. "Plug up dat gaspipe an' let's have somet'in' fresh an' invig'ratin' f'um youse. In udder words, don't be a stoopid ol' woman."

Billy prudently got out of range when he offered this advice, and the Sarpint, noting that Billy was too far to be reached easily, let the affront go by, and continued:

"I fell fer ther bluff them gents put up, an' 'lowed myse'f ter be corralled by ther hardest lot o' citizens ez ever defaced ther surface o' this hyar beautiful country."

"How was that?" asked Dick.

"When they'd got me so's I c'u'dn't do nothin' effective onder ther conditions—fer thar wuz eight .44's p'intin' close ter whar I keeps my idees—they med me ride away wi' 'em till they hed me ringed around wi' rocks in a dry arroyo. Then they passed a couple o' riatas keerlessly aroun' me an' my ho'se, Towzer, an' added ter ther indignity by hitchin' Towzer ter a pine-tree."

"Gee!" exclaimed Billy Doo, deeply interested.

"Yes," went on Handsome Harry. "In co'se, ez I wuz all tangled up in them ropes, I c'u'dn't he'p Towzer—not at first."

"But you got away at last?"

"Thet's apparant, Dick. Ef I hedn't got away, I w'u'dn't be hyar, fer them ballyhoos meant me ter stay thar till mornin', anyhow. They didn't argey thet I mought twist one o' my hands around enough ter git at my bowie——"

"Ah! I see!" interjected Dick.

"Shore yer sees, Dick. It's ther kind o' caper you'd

try, I'm thinkin', ef yer wuz ter find yerself in sech a predookymment. Waal, anyhow, I got my knife out of its sheath, an' ther rest wuz easy. Thet's how I come ter be ridin' down hyar ter see whut I c'u'd do."

"Why didn't you get here before and warn us?" demanded Tilly, the maiden sister, sharply.

"Which I re-moves my hat in ther presence o' ther fa'r sex," answered Handsome Harry gallantly. "I didn't git hyar airlier 'cause I wuzn't out o' ther ropes in time. But whut I wants ter say is this hyar: Them spo'ts ez hez carried off thet gal is among ther cunningest ter be found in all the West, which means thet thar ain't no greater bluffs this side of—"

The Sarpint pointed downward significantly.

"They are waiting to ambush us over there in the draw, I suppose, Sarpint," remarked Dick.

"Which they shorely air," agreed the Sarpint. "Whut's more, ther spo'ts whut's waitin' over yonder in ther pass ter bushwhack yer ain't ther same whut hez ther gal."

"What do you mean?" demanded Simon anxiously.

"I mean thet ther ol' sinner who wants ter git this gal hez paid these rascals enough ter purvide fer two separate parties. Ef yer'll put yerself onder ther guidance o' Di'mon' Dick, he kin tek yer ter whar ther gal is. In ther meantime, we don't hev ter go through ther pass at all."

"Is that so, Dick?" asked Judge Clark, who had been listening interestedly to the conversation without speaking. "Can you lead us to where the girl is hidden—or to be hidden?"

"I think I can. Although, if the Sarpint had not insisted on telling you, I should have preferred to let my actions speak for themselves, instead of announcing beforehand what I intended to do."

"Dey's nuttin' slow 'bout Di'mon' Dick," confided Billy Doo, privately, to Luke Garvin.

"Which way shall we go, Dick?" asked Simon eagerly.

Diamond Dick pointed to the mountains far over to the left, where, outlined sharply against the starry sky, could be made out, on the top of a precipice, the figures of three men on horseback, the leader of which was carrying across the pommel of his saddle something that every one in the camp could see was the form of a girl.

"We will go that way, Simon, said Dick quietly.

CHAPTER V.

THE VOICE IN THE GORGE.

In less than three minutes six men and a boy were riding hard toward the high mountain range where the three horsemen and their captive had been seen.

The vision had been there only for a few moments, but Diamond Dick knew the mountains so well that he was

confident he could pick up the trail and follow it to the end without difficulty.

Diamond Dick had no misgivings over leaving the women and children in the camp with practically no male protection. There were one or two men and the boy who looked after the horses, before referred to, but if the marauders descended upon the camp again they would find no effective opposition.

"They have got the girl, and that is all they seemed to want," remarked Judge Clark.

"Shore! them thar mavericks know whut they are after, an' they don't waste thar time on nothin' else," said Handsome Harry.

Dick did not know whether the men who had captured Bettina were aware that they were pursued or not, but he was almost certain that the other rascals, who had hoped to decoy him and his friends into the narrow gorge in the mountains, knew that he was going the other way.

"Ride hard, boys!" ordered Dick.

The party swept along at a gallop, widening the gap between themselves and the gorge where the Destroyers had been lying in ambush, but were now convinced that their scheme had failed.

That the intention was to do away with Diamond Dick and Simon Garvin, as the two persons most likely to seek vengeance for the stealing of Bettina, Dick was assured.

As for the other members of the wagon-train, they might be killed, or they might not. It would depend on whether they showed an inclination to fight.

"What do you suppose will be the end of all this?" asked Judge Clark, as he rode close by Dick's side.

"One thing will be the rescuing of Bettina Garvin, and another the punishment of Hezekiah Pine and his gang," replied Dick shortly.

"You know it is Hezekiah Pine, then?"

"Yes."

"Did you see his face?"

"It is not necessary always to see a man's face to be sure of him," said Dick. "At least, not on the plains or in the mountains. It would be a difficult job to trail any one if we had to see his features before recognizing him."

"Thet's right," coincided Handsome Harry gravely.

Dick rode a little ahead of his party till he found himself in the mountains, riding through a narrow gorge, which ascended gradually till it came to the ridge along which he had seen moving the three horsemen with their captive.

"It is here they may be waiting for us," thought Dick. "I reckon we shall have to go without noise if we want to make this expedition a success."

He turned in his saddle to look for the others.

Not one of them could he see, nor could he detect the sound of their horses' hoofs on the rocks.

"H'm! I see what is the matter. They have taken

the wrong road in the darkness. The draw branches off in two directions not more than half a mile back, and they must have gone to the left, instead of the right. Well, if they keep on, they will come out at the point where I expect to find myself some three miles ahead. It is just as well that they are not with me. This is the kind of thing I can do better by myself."

He was riding slowly, every sense on the alert, gazing at the narrow strip of starlit sky far above, which was all that could be made out between the vast walls of mountain.

It was a split, this gorge, as if it had been cut open by a convulsion of Nature.

But over the rough boulders it was possible to work steadily to the top, where it led to a long ridge, with an awful precipice on either side, until the side of a mountain was reached, where there was a wall on the one hand, but still the terrific drop on the other.

All this Dick was familiar with, for he had ridden through the Uintah Mountain range many times, and there were not many parts of it where he would be lost altogether.

Dick was looking about him as well as he could in the darkness, for he did not know how near an enemy might be, when he was startled by a low cry, which seemed to be in feminine tones.

"Help!"

The young scout reined up his thoroughbred sharply and listened intently for a repetition of the cry.

Soon it came—low, but insistent:

"Help!"

Prepared for the sound this time, Dick was able to determine on the instant that it came from over his head, and he looked up quickly.

Nothing was to be seen but the great rocky walls, rearing five hundred feet and more into the air.

They were seemingly as steep as the blank sides of two gigantic "skyscrapers" in a city, separated by a space of not more than ten feet, which appeared to be much less as Dick gazed upward.

"It came from above, I am sure," thought Dick. "It was a girl's voice, too. Of course, it is Bettina. That fellow, Hezekiah, has got her in some place where he is going to keep her till he can carry her safely to her destination, wherever it may be."

If there had been a moon, Dick might have been able to discern the figure of the girl who was praying for help in her sore extremity, but, as it was, nothing was to be made out but the frowning masses of granite so close together that he could almost touch them both simultaneously by stretching forth his arms.

"If they would only get out of these mountains, I should be prepared to give Hezekiah a surprise, I believe," went on Dick, to himself. "I know where these

Destroyers, as they call themselves, have their hiding-place."

"Help!"

The cry came for the third time, and, as Dick was looking straight up to the place whence the sound came, he was able to make out, this time, where the girl stood.

She was on a narrow ledge of rock, a little more than half-way up the five-hundred-foot wall—that is, about three hundred feet above the valley, and two hundred feet from the summit of the mountain.

"Bettina!" cried Dick.

"Help!"

It seemed as if the girl were so paralyzed by terror that she could not think of anything else to say than this one word.

"Is there any one with you?" asked Dick.

"No. Is that Diamond Dick?"

"Yes. Keep up your courage," he replied cheerily.

"But there is no way for any one to get at me. That is what he told me when he left me here."

"Who told you?"

"The man in the mask."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone."

"Can't you go the same way?"

"No. He and the others let me down by a rope from above. They are coming back for me in an hour, they told me."

"Kind of them," commented Dick. "Can you stay there for ten minutes, while I come to you?"

"Can you do it?"

"Yes," answered Diamond Dick simply.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK'S HAND OVER HAND.

Dick knew that he had promised to do something which would not be easy of accomplishment.

"So long as it is not impossible, I don't mind the trouble," he murmured, as he set about his preparations.

He listened carefully, with his ear to the ground, for a few moments, to discover whether any of his companions from camp were approaching.

"No," he said to himself, as he arose. "They have taken that other trail beyond question. I shall have to do this by myself, which is all the better. Stand still, Major!"

The thoroughbred hardly needed this hint, for he was in the habit of keeping quiet till his master told him what to do, but Dick uttered the adjuration as a precautionary measure.

The girl, far up on her giddy perch, where she evidently had no room to move about, was leaning back

against the wall, but the flutter of her garments could be made out from time to time.

Dick examined the flat surface below her, but he could not find a place anywhere which would give him the slightest chance of a handhold.

The wall was as smooth as if it had been planed, although Dick looked at it for a hundred yards up and down the gorge.

"Help!"

Bettina was in such a state of nervous excitement that she felt obliged to give utterance to a cry for aid once in a while, just to relieve the tension on her mind.

"All right, Bettina!" responded Dick encouragingly. "I shall be with you soon."

Bettina would have liked to ask Dick about her father, Simon Garvin, but she felt that it would be unwise to trouble the young fellow just now, when he was exerting himself so desperately on her behalf.

"Well, that wall is just about a baffle," muttered Dick, as he passed his hand over its smooth expanse.

He took out his bowie-knife and tried the point of it on the rock, to see whether there was any possibility of cutting niches.

But the mountain was of the hardest kind of stone, and Dick realized that his knife would be useless.

He was not disheartened, hard as the task of reaching Bettina threatened to be, but he realized that he must think up some plan different from any he had heretofore conceived.

Thoughtfully he stepped to the opposite wall of the ten-foot gorge and passed his hand over the surface.

He started, hopefully, as he noted that it was rough, and that there were niches and projections scattered numerously about.

He examined it more closely, and then pulled himself up a few feet, to find out how it was above.

The unevenness seemed to extend all the way up—at least as far as he could see and feel.

"Bettina!" he cried out.

"Yes!" came the eager response from the girl.

"Keep your courage up."

"I am trying to do so."

Dick talked lightly, for he felt that that would be the better way in which to keep Bettina's mind from grasping the full awfulness of her situation.

Taking the riata from his saddle-horn—a new rope, as tough as wire, which would bear much more strain than he intended to place upon it—Dick hung it over his left shoulder, as he glanced up the wall he intended to scale.

"Bettina!" he called out.

"Yes."

"I am coming up the other side of the cañon. Is there not a place large enough for me to stand on opposite the ledge under you?"

"Yes. How did you know that?"

Dick laughed to himself, as he replied:

"I did not know. I only guessed."

The fact was that Dick had had many opportunities of studying the phenomena of seismic disturbances—as scientific men call earthquakes—and he knew that when there came a gigantic rift like this through which he had been riding, the opposite sides of the split must bear a close relation to each other.

If there was a ledge projecting from one side, there must be a corresponding opening on the other, where the ledge once had its resting-place.

It was the same principle on which one breaks two loaves of bread apart, finding a hole on the side of one loaf, and an extra mass of bread on the other which originally had filled the hole.

It is necessary to keep this in mind to comprehend what sort of task Diamond Dick had undertaken.

"There is a large space in the rock opposite me," went on Bettina. "Two or three persons could stand there, and even move about, without falling into the ravine."

"Good! Now, keep quiet till I come up. I shall have no opportunity to talk," said Dick.

His riding-boots fitted him well, and his clothes in general were snug upon his lithe form, so that there was nothing likely to get in his way as he climbed.

After one final look up and down the draw, which assured him that no one was near, Diamond Dick began the ascent.

Only one who has struggled up three hundred feet along the face of a precipice can realize entirely what Dick had to do.

For the first fifty feet he went up with comparative ease.

"If it is like this all the way, I shall not have much trouble in getting to that place where Bettina tells me I can move about," he muttered to himself.

It was just as he made this observation that he found himself in difficulties.

There was a smooth space all about him—above and on either side—as far as he could reach.

He was standing on a small protuberance, holding to another which afforded him a fair grip, so that he could recover his breath and relieve his muscles a little as he gazed around.

His back was toward the opposite side of the divide, of course, so that he could not see the girl.

She was trying to make out where he was, but in the darkness of the hollow that was impossible, and she discovered his whereabouts only by the hard breathing which he could not help.

"Are you all right, Dick?" she asked.

"Yes. But I can't talk," he replied.

"I won't ask you to talk," she responded. "But I wanted you to know that I was waiting for you without making any fuss."

Dick was gratified at this assurance that Bettina was not likely to give way to any hysterical outbreak, and he renewed his endeavors to find a means of ascending.

At last he found that, by stretching his arm to its utmost, he could get his fingers into a horizontal crevice, with a sharp edge, which would give him a secure grip.

This would not have been a solution of the difficulty if Dick had not possessed tremendous muscular power in each arm, so that he could bear his entire weight holding on with one.

It was his right hand that was in the crevice, and as soon as he had satisfied himself that there was no danger of his fingers slipping, he braced his arm for a supreme effort and gradually pulled himself up.

His feet were of no use to him, for the absolutely smooth surface gave him no assistance.

Diamond Dick was fully aware that a slip or a failure of his muscles would send him in a heap into the cañon, and that the fall of fifty feet must disable, even if it did not kill, him.

But he was not going to fall, and he knew it.

Any one else would have known it, too, if it had been possible for a spectator of the firm mouth and contracted brows to be there.

Diamond Dick was of the type of young Americans who "do things."

When he had drawn himself up to the crevice which his fingers gripped so determinedly, he found a place for his other hand, and then he got his toes into little pockets, as well.

"Whew! That was a tough place! Reckon I'll rest a while!"

He felt above him as he rested, and was pleased to find that it was rough for some distance over his head, at least, whatever it might turn out to be farther away.

Up the wall he went, climbing with catlike facility, and taking advantage of every inequality.

He came to three other places like that which had caused him difficulty on the completion of his first fifty feet, but, having had experience with the first, he knew what he had to expect, and was thus better able to deal with the new obstacles.

It cannot be denied that Dick was glad when he found himself sitting in the niche, opposite Bettina, taking a well-earned rest of a minute or so.

Then he looked at the awful chasm between himself and the girl—ten feet wide and three hundred feet deep—and he realized that the most difficult part of his work was yet to come.

CHAPTER VII.

BY THE ROPE ROUTE.

"You do not hear any one coming above, do you, Bettina?" asked Dick, more for the sake of making con-

versation and keeping up her courage than anything else.

"No. They said they would be back in an hour. It is not much more than half an hour since they went away, is it?"

"Maybe not."

Dick was afraid it was nearer an hour than a half, for the work of scaling the perpendicular cliff seemed to have occupied him a very long time.

He did not say this to Bettina, however; all he wanted was to keep her nerve up to concert pitch.

Unslinging the coil of rope from his shoulder, Dick began to run it through his hands, in the endeavor to take some of the stiffness out, and thus render it more convenient for use.

Bettina called out to say that she had the rope with her, by means of which she had been lowered to the ledge.

"What is the condition of that rope, Bettina?" he asked.

"It is nearly new, I think," she answered, picking up the rope, which lay in a heap at her feet. "I do not see any part of it that looks weak."

"Glad of it, since that may have to get us out of this trouble," was Dick's rejoinder.

He stood considering for a few moments, for it was not quite clear to him how he should let the girl down even when he was on the same side of the chasm.

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it," was his decision, as he looped one end of his own rope over a crag that he had observed as soon as he reached the niche.

"That is as firm as if it were an iron hook made on purpose for it," he muttered. "Perhaps firmer, for iron hooks pull out sometimes, and that rock never can be stirred—until another earthquake comes along."

"What shall I do, Dick?" asked Bettina. "I can put the end of this rope into a crack under my feet which will hold it perfectly secure, especially if I tie a big knot in it."

"That's right, Bettina. You catch the idea," said Dick. "Where did you learn so much about mountain-climbing? There are no mountains in Michigan, so far as I remember."

"Perhaps not. But there are plenty of big trees, and I have often gone to the tops of high ones, hunting for hickory-nuts, when I was a little girl—and even since I have been a big one."

"That was good practise for what you have to do now," observed Dick. "Hickory-trees are pretty tall, as a rule."

"And the best nuts are at the very top," added Bettina. "I never got dizzy, however. That will help me now if we have to go down to the bottom of the cañon by ropes."

"I don't know that we shall even have ropes," answered Dick. "But if that knot is firm on your side, suppose you throw the other end of the rope to me."

The girl obeyed, and Dick secured it at his end by the side of the new riata he had brought with him. Then he tossed the end of the latter to Bettina, directing her to fasten it in the crevice with the other.

She took it all as a matter of course, proud that Diamond Dick depended on her in anything at all.

"All right?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

Without any more parley, Dick swung himself on the sagging ropes, and worked rapidly to the other side.

Bettina impulsively gave him her hand as he reached the ledge whereon she stood.

"I know we are all right, now," she said.

"We shall be, unless I am much mistaken," answered Dick. "I came over here for two reasons. One was that I wanted to make sure the ropes would hold at your end——"

"I knew they would hold," she interrupted, with something like a pout.

"Of course. But I didn't, you know. The other reason was that some one must loosen the ends after you have passed over."

"Why?"

"I want to use them to get you down, you know."

"I had forgotten that," confessed Bettina.

"Now, do you think you can pull yourself along over those two riatas?"

"I have done worse than that in hunting for hickory-nuts."

"All right, then. Come here!"

Dick showed her how to rest herself with her right arm over the ropes, while using her left hand to haul herself along, and she dropped into the correct position without difficulty.

In five minutes Bettina was safe in the niche, on the other side of the ten-foot gap.

"Now, what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'll show you in a moment."

He lifted the two ropes out of the crevice after a series of sharp tugs, remarking, with a little laugh of approval:

"You certainly gave these cords a good tight hold, Bettina. They never would have pulled out."

"I didn't intend they should."

Having at last removed the ropes from the crevice, Dick advanced to the very brink of the precipice, twisting the ropes around his hands and arms.

"I shall have to come carefully, so that the bottom of my feet will hit that wall first," he remarked, as he prepared for his plunge. "If I slam my knees against the rock, I am afraid it will make them ache."

Bettina was watching him in the gloom so closely that

Dick warned her to step back, lest she were to fall over.

Measuring his distance carefully, Dick let himself go, and so skilfully that his soles struck the rock with a resounding slap ere he hung below the niche where Bettina was waiting for him.

"Here I am!" he exclaimed, laughing, as he hauled himself up the rope and stood by the girl's side. "It was not much of a thing to do. What we have to accomplish now is the business that will draw upon our strength and courage, Bettina."

It was the natural delicacy of Dick's nature that made him say "our" strength and courage. As a matter of fact, he had no doubt of his own, but he knew that the girl would feel hurt if he threw any doubt on her willingness or ability to climb down to the bottom of the cañon.

"How are we going to do it, Dick?" she asked.

He was examining the two riatas thoughtfully.

"The two, fastened together, will not reach half-way down the hole," he remarked, as he passed the ropes through his hands and then tied the two into one with a knot that he new would never slip.

"Then we shall have to go as far as we can, and scramble down the rocks without them for the remainder of the distance, eh?"

Dick could not help patting her on the shoulder, for he admired her simple bravery.

"How do you know we can find a place which will be easy enough for you to get down?" he asked.

"One must take some chances," she laughed. "I feel as if I do not care for anything so long as I am out of reach of those awful men in the black masks."

The girl took the rope in her hands and twisted it about as her companion did, to make it as pliable as might be.

Dick seemed to come to a decision, as he fastened the end of the long rope, made up of the two lariats, to the rock that had held it before, when they were crossing the chasm. Then he showed the girl a wide loop, which he placed over her head and under her arms.

She made no comment, but allowed him to dispose the rope at his pleasure, until he asked her if she was ready to go down.

"At any moment," was her reply.

"Then, listen. When you get to the full length of the rope, you must call out to me."

"Yes. But where will you be? Up here?"

"Of course. I must stay till you are down, so as to unfasten the rope. We shall want it again."

"Oh!" said Bettina, who did not follow the young scout's reasoning altogether clearly. "What then?"

"When you have called to me that you are at the end of the rope, you must——"

"Slip the loop off?"

"No, Bettina. Keep the rope where it is. Let me explain."

"I beg your pardon for interrupting."

"You must let the loop remain around you, but take your weight off it by clinging to the rocks as soon as you find projections that will support you. Understand?"

"I see."

"When you can keep yourself there without the aid of the rope, tell me. Then I will loosen it at the top and climb down with it. When I can find a good place to secure it to the face of the cliff I will give you warning, and you can continue to descend."

"You want to keep the riata attached, in case I should slip. Is that the idea, Dick?"

"That is it, exactly."

"I shall not slip," said the girl quietly, as she began the dangerous trip over the precipice.

Dick, carefully paying out the rope, smiled to himself. This was the kind of comrade to have, girl as she was!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHADOW IN THE CANON.

That an hour must have passed, or very nearly, since the masked scoundrels left Bettina on that dangerous ledge, Dick felt sure, and he was glad when the girl vanished below the edge, going down bravely, as he paid out the rope, inch by inch.

"I am glad she used to pick hickory-nuts," muttered the young scout. "I don't suppose she ever thought, while she was hanging to a limb on a tree in Michigan, that the practise would help to save her from a fearful fate in the Uintah Mountains out West."

"Dick!" called out Bettina.

"Well?"

"It's easy," she cried. "I can go faster, if you will let the rope move freer."

"No. You are going fast enough. You will get to a place where you will have to swing loose, perhaps. Don't get flustered if you cannot find anywhere to rest your foot. I have you all right."

Dick's prediction came true almost immediately, and he found himself sustaining the entire weight of the girl, who had slipped, and would have gone headlong into the abyss but for his steady hold.

The difficulty was soon over, however, and when she had regained her position on the rugged surface of the rock, she remained still for at least a minute, to recover her nerve.

"All serene?" asked Dick, as if nothing unusual had happened.

"Everything is all right," she replied. "I am in an easy place. But I am glad there is a rope around my waist."

Dick said nothing, but he kept a careful grip on the rope, paying it out with more deliberation than before.

Not a sound of any stranger had there been since Dick began to climb the three hundred feet until now, and the young scout began to believe that he would get Bettina back to camp without so very much difficulty, after all.

"When I do we will drive the wagons through that pass and make our way to the open, where there will be no chance of a surprise," decided Dick. "As for the Sarpint, Billy Doo, and the rest, they will rejoin us farther along. The main thing is to get away from these Destroying Angels, as they call themselves."

Bettina accomplished the remainder of the journey to the end of the long rope without incident, and then, as Dick could not give her any more, he told her that that was the full length of the line.

"Can you find a place to stand where you are?" he asked.

"Yes. There is a ledge almost as large as a door-step under my feet, and plenty of projections for my hands. I couldn't be in a better spot," was her reply.

Now came the ticklish part of the work.

Dick loosened the rope from the crag which had held it, and, coiling up as much of it as he could, he began to descend into the chasm, taking up more of the slack as he went down.

He had descended a hundred feet before he decided to look for a spot where he might hope to attach the line so that it would hold.

His search was in vain, and he made up his mind that he must depend on his own strength to support Bettina if she should lose her grip at any moment in the latter half of the journey.

Soon he stood beside her on what she had described as a door-step.

It was some distance to the right of the place where he had climbed upward, and, in the darkness, he had, of course, not been able to see it.

"This is exceedingly convenient, Bettina," observed Diamond Dick, with his customary coolness. "Now, are you ready for the rest of this trip?"

"Quite."

"Go ahead, then."

The young girl had shown herself so entirely equal to the occasion that Dick did not worry when she went cautiously down from the step, talking all the way to prove that she was progressing smoothly.

He kept the rope firmly in his hand, however, letting it go only when assured that Bettina had reached another secure place after leaving the one she had previously occupied.

So wide was Dick's foothold that he needed only one hand to keep himself from toppling over backward, leaving the other free to manipulate the line.

Bettina had gone about fifty feet when there came such a sharp tug that Dick was obliged to exert all his strength to save himself from a fall.

The girl was swinging to the rope, having lost her hold of the rock entirely.

"I can't find a place for my feet, Dick," she called out to him, as she swung.

"I'll let you down a little."

"All right!"

Dick suited the action to the word, allowing her to descend about ten feet before she told him she was all right again.

"I'm glad of it," muttered Dick to himself. "It is not an easy thing to hold a hundred-and-forty-pound girl at the end of a half-inch rope, with nothing but this ledge to stand on, and not much of a hold for your hands. I hope Bettina won't do that again."

Indeed Dick had been nearer to death than he cared to acknowledge to himself, while, as for Bettina, she never did know what a narrow escape she had had.

Slowly went Bettina down into the deep shadows of the chasm, with Dick carefully paying out the rope, and hoping the adventure would end successfully.

"I don't see how it can finish any other way now, however," he told himself. "She is near the bottom, for the rope is almost out. As for myself, I am satisfied that I can get down all right."

Just then a cheery cry came from the girl.

"Hello, Dick!"

"Well?"

"I am at the bottom."

"Quite?"

"Quite."

"Capital!" he shouted. "Take off the rope. Look out! I am going to throw it down."

"Let it come."

Down came the rope, and a few minutes later Dick was by the side of the girl in the bottom of the chasm.

"How can I thank you, Dick?" asked the girl, as she took his hand and pressed it gratefully.

"By saying nothing about it. But we are not out of our difficulty yet, remember. We must make our way back to camp, and even then we do not know what the Destroyers will be doing."

"You can keep them off, I am sure," said Bettina, and her tone indicated that she had every confidence in the dashing young plainsman.

"I must keep them off if they come," responded Dick, who was too sincere to pretend that he doubted his own ability.

He whistled to Major, who came ambling to him in the darkness, guided by the sound that he knew came from his master.

"Now, Bettina, you rode into this place in front of

Hezekiah Pine. I suppose you will not mind going back on the pommel of my saddle."

"With a blanket on, I hope," she laughed. "The pommel of a Mexican saddle needs some padding, to make it comfortable."

"I have a thick blanket strapped to the back of the saddle," answered Dick. "I will transfer it to the front, and you will have as pleasant a seat as I can arrange under the circumstances."

It was very dark in this narrow gorge—which seemed much narrower than its ten feet after being up so high—and the breeze rushing through it with a long moan gave an uncanny feeling to the girl, as she waited for Dick to place the blanket on his saddle.

The young scout went about the task in a businesslike way characteristic of him.

First he untied the two riatas and slung them both, separately, upon the saddle-horn. Then he removed the blanket from the cantle.

He stopped and called to Bettina: "What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"You spoke, didn't you?"

"No."

"Didn't you cough, or make some sound?" asked Dick, puzzled.

"No. I didn't cough nor speak, Dick. Did you think you heard me?"

Dick placed the blanket on the front of the saddle, and fastened it securely, before he responded carelessly:

"I thought you spoke, but it was the rushing of the wind. I hear it again. Come along!"

With a quick movement, he seized her hand and whispered in her ear, as he helped her to a seat on the blanket:

"Hold tight to the saddle-horn and take no notice of anything that may happen."

Bettina Garvin was a bright young girl, who could take a hint quicker than most persons, and she knew something strange was going on, even before Dick threw himself into the saddle and started Major on the jump, with a whispered word and just a touch of the spur.

The black thoroughbred had not taken more than two or three bounds when something loomed up squarely in his path, filling up the whole space of ten feet between the mountain walls, as a fierce voice growled:

"Halt! It ain't no good, Di'mon' Dick! We air goin' ter keep yer right hyar!"

CHAPTER IX.

DICK HELPS HIS PARDS.

"I don't think you are," was Diamond Dick's defiant rejoinder, as he put spurs to his horse and again whispered to him in the tone Major never disobeyed.

Dick had seen that there were two men on horseback immediately in front of him, and still another farther along.

Even before he had finished questioning Bettina as to the noise he had heard, he knew that it was an involuntary cough by one of the three men who had captured the girl and left her on that high ledge, where they supposed she would be absolutely beyond the possibility of rescue.

That they had come back to look for her, expecting to find her dead among the rocks at the bottom, was clear enough.

Now had come their surprise, when they discovered that she was not only unhurt, but in the care of the intrepid young United States marshal who had struck terror into the hearts of the lawless element of the Hole-in-the-Wall community more than once in the past.

"Sit firm, Bettina!" said Dick quietly, as he tightened the grasp of his left arm about the girl.

"Have you an extra pistol, Dick?"

"Yes. Take mine. I will use the Winchester."

He was pleased that she showed such a disposition to take part in the fight that was inevitable, and, as he brought his rifle to the "ready," he also placed his Colt in her hand, confident that she would employ it to advantage, if the necessity arose.

"Stand out of my way!" commanded Dick, in a loud tone, as the shadows of the three horsemen before him did not advance.

"Say another word like that and we'll shoot you down in your saddle," was the fierce rejoinder.

"Keep quiet!" put in the voice of Hezekiah Pine. "I'm doing this. You don't want to kill the girl, do you, Doctor?"

This last sentence had been addressed to one of the three rascals by the leader, and the inadvertent use of the word "Doctor" had told Dick that in the precious trio was a savant called Doctor Fleischman, who was so able a chemist and scientist generally that he exercised an almost supernatural influence over many of the residents of Utah.

Besides being one of the greatest chemists in the country, Doctor Fleischman bore the unenviable reputation of being as great a scoundrel as ever escaped the hangman's rope.

The Doctor had had already several wives, and now wanted Bettina to add to the number.

In the pursuit of his scientific studies, Doctor Fleischman traveled all over the country, and it was on one of these excursions, which took him into the backwoods of Michigan, that he had seen Bettina Garvin on her father's farm in the heart of a forest.

The Doctor had spent a day and night at the farmhouse, and had tried to make himself agreeable to Bettina, but only to be treated in the offhand manner a

young girl would be likely to assume to a snuffy-looking individual of past middle age, who had neither good looks nor pleasant manners.

Doctor Fleischman had decided there and then, however, that he would eventually marry Bettina, and, hearing that the whole family intended to go West in the following spring, he set his spies to work, and kept track of the wagon-train all the way, where, as we have seen, he employed the unscrupulous braves to steal her from her friends.

Doctor Fleischman was a burly, fat-faced man, with a hideous big red nose and wide mouth, which always looked, even when his face was in repose, as if it were distended in a ghastly grin.

He was utterly without pity, and cared nothing for any crimes which seemed to him requisite to gain his ends.

There had been a short pause after Hezekiah's warning to the Doctor, during which Dick made up his mind what to do.

Cautiously turning Major on his heels, with so little noise that the scoundrels could not tell by either sight or sound what Dick was about, the young plainsman suddenly touched his horse with a spur, as he whispered an injunction in his ear.

Dick had decided that, as he could not easily get past the three men in his path, the wise course was to run the other way.

Major had covered a dozen yards in bounding leaps before it dawned on Hezekiah what had happened.

"Look out! He's running away!" he yelled, then. "After him! Let your horses out!"

"An extra hundred if you catch them, Hezekiah!" bawled the Doctor excitedly.

"We'll catch 'em, Doc," said the third man, who had not spoken heretofore. "They can't git away."

Dick knew that his pursuers were talking; in fact, he heard the offer of Doctor Fleischman of an extra hundred dollars; but it only amused him.

Well did Diamond Dick know there was no other horse in that region capable of overhauling Major when it came to a straight race over a level road.

Everything was in Major's favor now, and Dick felt the exultation of rapid movement as his noble thoroughbred thrust his nose between his knees and galloped in long, sinuous strides.

"Take back your revolver, Dick," cried the girl, when they had ridden for nearly a mile, and the gorge was gradually widening. "It might drop out of my hand."

Without comment, he took the pistol and dropped it into its holster, at the same time replacing the Winchester in its case by the side of the saddle.

They were leaving the three pursuers behind them, and soon they were out of the cañon altogether, speed-

ing along over the open plain, with the foot-hills of the mountains on their left.

"Which way are we going, Dick?" asked the girl, as the thoroughbred slackened his speed, in picking his way among the rough stones.

They had completely outdistanced the three masked men, so that Dick was glad to ease his horse a little.

"We will make the regular trail, to the left, and ride on until we are safe from possible ambush," observed Dick quietly. "The rascals will watch the wagons, doubtless, so that it will be better to keep away from them for the present. It was as well that those ruffians were in the gorge, to prevent our riding out that way."

Bettina was quite content to do whatever Diamond Dick proposed, having entire confidence in him.

They chanced to be in a hollow when Dick reined up for a moment, to adjust some portion of his horse's equipment, so that he could not have seen very far about him, even if it had been daylight.

If he had been on an eminence, instead, possibly he might have had some premonition of what was to follow, for there seemed to be a regular army of horsemen surrounding him on the instant, yelling and shooting as if they were trying how much noise they could make.

It was a startling surprise.

"Down, Bettina!" whispered Dick, as he leaped to the ground, dragging the girl with him.

Pulling at the bridle of his thoroughbred, Dick caused the sagacious creature to drop to his knees, crouching as low as he could, so that, in the gloom, he might easily have been mistaken for a large boulder embedded in the earth.

It was a trick Dick had taught the horse long before, and which had proved useful more than once when he had been beset by enemies, with no one to give him help.

The wisdom of the move was shown a moment later, when two masked men swept through the hollow, on either side of the horse, with Dick and Bettina lying so close against that they might have been part of the same huge stone.

The men were evidently part of Hezekiah Pine's band, for they wore the rough garb and slouch-hats affected by all of them, while the black masks would have indicated their connection, had there been nothing else.

The roar of six-shooters continued, mingled with yells and counter-yells from all sides.

Suddenly a voice that Dick recognized bellowed through the din.

"Wow! Whar air yer! I'm ther ol' Sarpint o' Sis-kiyou, wi' seventeen rattles an' a button! I'm primed fer war, an' I want ter chaw up ther hull commoonity! Hyar I am, wi' my teeth all full o' pizen! Come on, yer coyotes, an' drop dead afore me! Wough-h-h-h-h!"

It was Handsome Harry, and it did not take Diamond

Dick long to understand that his pard was surrounded by the ruffians who had been trying to steal Bettina, and were willing to destroy the whole camp in the effort.

Before he had more than risen to his feet, pistol in hand, to jump to the assistance of the Sarpint, Handsome Harry, on his roan, and Billy Doo, with his white horse, Tammany, came bounding into the hollow, chasing two of the masked men.

But only for a moment were Handsome Harry and Billy Doo the pursuers.

Four others of the scoundrels piled into the hollow, keeping away instinctively from the supposed boulder composed of Major, Dick, and Bettina, and charged directly at Handsome Harry and the boy.

With enemies in front—for the two men they had been chasing wheeled around when they heard their comrades following—as well as behind, the Sarpint and Billy were in a tight place, fight as hard as they would.

"Hully chee! Sarp! Plug some o' these here guys, or we's goin' ter git it in de neck!" squeaked Billy Doo.

One of the four men behind them swung a rifle over the lad's head, and was about to bring it down with a murderous smash, when there was a bang, and, as the fellow fell to the ground headlong, Diamond Dick, pistol in hand, rose in the midst of the mêlée!

CHAPTER X.

FOXES RUN TO EARTH.

The surprise for the outlaws was so great, that Dick had time to get a good hold on the wounded ruffian's horse before the others could return to the attack.

There was a general mix-up, for, in the darkness, no one knew exactly where the shot had come from that sent the ruffian into the dust.

"Here I am, Sarp!" said Dick, in a low tone, as he caught the bridle of the riderless horse. "Ride ahead as hard as you can, with the girl. I will stand off the others."

"I don't savvy," answered the Sarpint hurriedly.

"Wait a moment!"

Dick stooped to the girl and whispered to her to ride with Handsome Harry, explaining to her in a few words that she must hang to the saddle as well as she could.

"All right, Dick," was her response.

He lifted her sideways upon the saddle of the disabled fellow's horse, and the Sarpint saw what he was to do.

It was a well-managed feat, for the girl and Handsome Harry had dashed out of the hollow almost before the five remaining rascals knew who had shot their comrade.

"Now, Billy!" cried Dick, as, astride of his own thoroughbred, he thrust two of the men out of the way and hastened after the Sarpint and his fair charge.

"Whee! Dis is where we frames up a neat little game dat will make dem guys lose, unless I'm 'way off de guess," squeaked Billy Doo, as he raced behind Handsome Harry.

The whole proceeding had not taken more than a minute from the time Dick had heard the shouts and revolvers until he and Billy were riding hard toward the Uintah Mountains on the left, where ran the trail which would bring them eventually to Nevada.

The six outlaws recovered themselves quickly, but were obliged to stop with their wounded associate for a few moments, finding that he had received a bullet through his leg.

He was howling with pain, for he did not know how badly he was injured, and he seemed to think it wise to make as much fuss as he could, so that his pards would stay with him.

None of the six masked men seemed to belong to the party that had pursued Dick and Bettina through the gorge.

"What shall we do with this fellow?" asked one of them, in a disgusted tone.

"We shall have to stay with him until we find some way of moving him over to the house," answered another. "The chief would never forgive us if we left him. You know it is against orders to leave a wounded comrade, for fear some one might find him and learn a secret."

"All right! Get some water from that spring over there. I will tear up my handkerchief into strips. We'll fix his leg so that it will not get any worse. Then I suppose we'd better take him to the house. It is not more than a mile and a half."

The six men, all of whom spoke in fairly well-chosen terms, indicating that they were not of the laboring class, ministered to their wounded companion, who howled through the operation perseveringly.

Meanwhile, Dick hastened after his two pards and Bettina.

They were out of sight in the darkness, but he could hear the clatter of hoofs, so that he knew they were still on the way, although a considerable distance ahead.

He could have reduced the gap materially had he chosen, but it was the idea of Dick that it would be better to stay behind, in case of an attempt of the fellows he had left in the hollow riding after them.

"We have taken their horse, too," thought Dick. "That will give the man excuse for branding us as horse-thieves—although I do not think they feel that they need any excuse for falling upon us if they can."

Diamond Dick had no compunction about having shot down the man in the hollow. Indeed, he believed it would be better for the world if all of these rascals and hired murderers were swept off the face of the earth.

"I shall be glad when we get them out of this neighborhood, however," thought Dick. "I wonder where the others are."

Indeed Dick had been so occupied in getting the girl out of the hollow on the horse of the fellow he had shot down that he had not thought to inquire as to the whereabouts of the four prospectors who had been riding with them.

"Simon and Luke Garvin, Judge Clark, and Jack Jolly," said Dick to himself, counting the names. "Where can they be?"

The answer to this question would come later, but just then Dick had to trust to the future to tell him.

He was not sure whether any of them had been connected with the affray into which he had been projected so unexpectedly, but he did not think so, or he would have seen or heard something of them before the Sarp and Billy Doo galloped away with Bettina.

It was not likely that Simon Garvin would have kept quiet when he knew that there was something strange going on in that hollow, especially as the voice of his daughter had been raised more than once before she rode off with her two protectors.

Dick kept on at a steady canter, so that Major did not feel the exertion, but he soon noticed that the rattle of hoofs in front had gathered in volume.

He reined up his horse for a moment to listen.

"There are more than three horses there," he muttered. "The noise sounds to me as if there were six, at least."

He listened a moment or two longer, and his well-trained hearing enabled him to say positively that there were something like twenty-four hoofs beating the rocky trail.

"Yes; there are six horses. That is certain," he said to himself. "I reckon I'll hurry a little."

Dick had conjectured instantly that the three men he had left behind him in the ravine had caught his pards and the girl, having come some other way, and his conjecture was correct.

There were so many paths through the mountains, by which it was possible to reach given points, and some of them were shorter than others.

The route originally taken by Dick and Bettina had been fairly direct, but there was another, followed by Hezekiah Pine, Doctor Fleischman, and Nathan Moser—the third of the trio—which had brought them out to the open plain before the marshal even reached the hollow where the battle took place.

Hezekiah had heard the shots and yelling over by the hollow, and calmly waited to see what would be the result of the disturbance.

Then he had heard three horses dash away, and caught

enough of what Dick and Billy Doo said to understand the situation.

"Let's see what you can do, Major," whispered Dick to his horse, as he shook the bridle.

The thoroughbred, understanding at once that extra exertion was demanded of him, shot forward with his usual smooth action, and Dick felt that he was rapidly lessening the distance between himself and the six persons riding in front.

He felt in his holster, to assure himself that his six-shooter was there, and then allowed his hand to steal to the rifle in its sheath by the side of the saddle.

"I may not have to use them, but one never knows. I am quite sure that if there is another attempt to take Bettina away there will be some excitement," he remarked to himself.

On through the rough masses of rocks in the foot-hills of the Uintah Mountains plunged Dick on his thoroughbred, and ever he could distinguish the irritating clatter of hoofs in front—seemingly not so very far away, but never close enough for him to make out who was in the party, or what they were doing.

The clear air of the mountains allows sounds to travel a long way, and Dick, who had passed all his life in the West, understood this perfectly.

He was on the alert, however, for the presence of an enemy, in case one should appear at his very elbow.

It was not an uncommon experience for one on the war-trail to find a foe close to him who was supposed to be a mile or two away, and Diamond Dick knew that it was not safe to take too much for granted when in an enemy's country.

Suddenly the rocks that had impeded Dick's view on the left came to an end, and he found himself gazing through an opening upon a level stretch of plain, sloping downward to a river, on the brink of which was a large house, whose size was outlined by several windows in which a strong light shone.

As Dick looked, he saw the shadows of several horsemen pass one of the illuminated windows, and the next moment caught the half-stifled voice of Bettina Garvin, as she screamed in terror.

"Wow! Whar air yer?" roared Handsome Harry, somewhere, followed by Billy Doo with "Back up, Sarp! Don't shoot! Dey's got us all snaked up, an' we can't do nuttin'."

This was followed by a number of hoarse voices, uttering oaths and threats, and then the banging of doors for several moments.

Diamond Dick dashed down the slope toward the house, but pulled up his thoroughbred only just in time to avoid a fence of barbed wire stretched across the roadway, and into which he would have rushed had not some observation or instinct warned him in time.

CHAPTER XI.

DICK USES THE TELEPHONE.

"This is one of their tricks for keeping off undesired visitors, eh?" muttered Dick. "I saw those posts, and I suspected something of this kind. It was considerate in them to paint their fences white, or I might have been caught."

He dismounted, and discovered that the wire had been hastily looped over a post at one end.

"Shows they came through in a hurry," he commented to himself. "Pity they were not a little longer fixing this fence. Then I might have caught them outside the house."

He stood still, reflecting, with Major's soft nose close to his cheek.

He saw that there were only two windows lighted up now, although there had been five a few minutes before.

Even as he watched, one of the two lights on the upper floor was extinguished, evidently by some one closing a shutter, and almost immediately the last one went dark, too.

"If I needed anything to tell me there is mischief over in that house," muttered Dick, "that shutting up of the windows would do it. If I am not much mistaken, that is the house where old Doctor Fleischman lives when he is not in his town place. I never saw it before, but the description fits exactly."

It was a puzzling situation for Diamond Dick, and he hardly knew how to proceed.

If it had been a plain, straight fight that faced him he would not have hesitated; but the deadly cunning of these rascals was something to be dreaded.

There was a clump of pine-trees near where he stood, and he led his horse over to them silently, watching the house meanwhile, and on the lookout for any spies who might be abroad.

Having placed Major in the shadow, with a whispered admonition to stand still, Dick stepped from beneath the trees, and—caught by the throat a burly fellow, in a black mask, who had been crouching by the side of the fence-post ever since Dick had arrived.

"What's this you—" gurgled the masked man, as Dick, his two hands about his neck, forced him backward to the ground.

"Keep quiet, or I'll kill you!" answered Dick, in low, fierce tones.

The other did not doubt that Dick meant what he said, for there could be no mistaking his sincerity.

"How many men are in that house?" demanded Dick.

His prisoner writhed and twisted, but could not utter a sound, although apparently he was endeavoring to answer the query.

"Oh, I see!" said Dick, with a grim smile, as he loosened his hands a little about the man's throat. "Now,

how many are there in that house? I asked you that before."

"I—I—don't know."

"Don't try to dodge the truth. How many do you think?"

"Waal, I sh'u'd reckon they wuz——" began the ras-cal slowly, evidently aiming to gain time.

Dick cut him short by compressing his hands, and snatched the mask from the face of his captive.

It was too dark to make out exactly what he looked like, but the stars enabled Dick to see that there was a heavy mustache, and that the left cheek bore a long scar.

"H'm! Nathan Moser, eh?"

"No. Thet thar ain't my name," insisted the ruffian, as Dick involuntarily loosened his hold.

"Keep quiet," commanded Dick sternly. "If you speak again, except in reply to a question, I'll choke you in real earnest. You know enough about me to be convinced that I will keep my word."

Nathan Moser did know, and he listened in respectful silence to what further Diamond Dick had to say.

"In the first place, Nathan, how many more are there around this post and barbed wire? You may speak."

"None."

"I don't believe you. If I find there are any more, I'll cut your throat before anything else is done," replied Dick.

"Waal, yer kin, ef yer like. But it's ther trooth. I wuz ter come over hyar an' gi' a signal ef thar wuz any one aroun'."

"What signal?"

The fellow was silent until Dick squeezed him to loosen his tongue. Then he blurted out:

"Telephone."

"Where is it?"

It required a number of choking pressures to make Nathan tell where the instrument was through which he had been able to communicate with the house from this spot, nearly a mile away.

"I'll throttle you to death first, and then find the telephone without you," threatened the young scout, at last.

"Hold on!"

Nathan Moser was just able to get this request from between his blue lips, and Dick allowed him to continue:

"Look at ther bottom o' this hyar post nigh me."

Without letting go of his prisoner's neck, Dick stooped and found one of those combination telephone receivers and transmitters, all in one piece, which since have become so common everywhere.

A hasty examination, almost entirely by the sense of touch, since it was too dark to see what it all looked like, Dick found that the instrument was attached to a wire fastened to the barbed-wire fence.

"I see," muttered Dick. "The fence goes all the way

down to the house by a roundabout course, so that there is no need for poles or a special stringing of the telephone connection. An ingenious affair—just what one might expect in the home of a man with the scientific knowledge of old Doc Fleischman."

"You see how she works?" asked Nathan.

"Perfectly!"

Dick had been holding his captive with one hand, but so tightly that there was no disposition on the part of Nathan to attempt any treachery.

Now, however, when Dick meant to find his way into the house by strategy, in the course of which he might need both his hands, he took the precaution to search his ruffianly companion for weapons.

A six-shooter and bowie-knife were his harvest, and he placed both weapons in his own belt, with the remark:

"Don't misbehave yourself, Nathan, unless you want to be shot or stabbed with these implements you have been kind enough to bring with you. I have a very nervous finger on the trigger, as perhaps you know already."

Placing the telephone-instrument in Nathan's hand, he drew his six-shooter and held the muzzle close to the ear of the trembling wretch, as he ordered him to call up the house.

Nathan pressed a button on the instrument which rang a bell in Doctor Fleischman's study.

Dick took the instrument and placed the receiver to his own ear, until he heard Doctor Fleischman's voice inquiring whether that was Nathan talking.

"Yes," growled Dick, imitating the coarse tones of Moser to perfection.

"Everything all right?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes," replied Dick.

"What about Diamond Dick?"

"He's off ther trail," was Dick's response, in Nathan's tones and general style. "He's ridin' off ez fast ez he kin. I seed him a while ago. He ain't nowhar nigh hyar now."

A chuckle came over the wire, and Dick knew that Doctor Fleischman had not suspected that it was any one but Nathan talking to him.

"Well, stay there for another half-hour, to make sure no one is around. Then you may come to the house and take a sleep. I suppose you are ready to turn in."

Dick yawned in front of the transmitter, but at once cut off the sound, as if trying to hide it from the chemist in the house.

"Look here, Nathan," said Doctor Fleischman.

"Yes," responded Dick.

"You can come in now, if you like. We have the girl and those two partners of Diamond Dick's, and there is nothing more to fear. It will be easy to keep them out of sight, even if any one does come. I'll see that the wagons pass along to Nevada. That's all."

The exultant tones of Doctor Fleischman over the phone told Dick that the cunning rascal could hardly contain his triumph over the success of his maneuvers, and it made the young scout's blood seethe in his veins.

"All right. I'll come in," he replied, in Nathan Moser's accents, as he laid the instrument in its secret corner.

Dick's resolve was soon made.

"Take off your hat, Nathan."

The rascal obeyed wonderingly, and Dick, removing his own, put on the big slouch article Nathan Moser had been wearing, tucking his yellow hair inside.

"Your hair and mine are about the same color, Moser," remarked Dick. "The only difference is that mine is long, and yours is not. I dare say I can pass for you, especially with a mask on."

Dick put on the black mask, after observing that Nathan's general attire was like his own, consisting of buckskin "chaps" over his trousers and a flannel outing-shirt under his rough coat.

"I shall have to borrow your coat," went on Dick, and, compelling the fellow to remove his sack coat, he put it on over his flannel shirt, changing his appearance entirely.

Dick had just finished these preparations for the plan he had in view, when, with a low "Hist!" to Nathan, he dragged him down flat upon the ground, and lay there himself, behind the fence-post where the end of the barbed wire which guarded the opening to Doctor Fleischman's property was attached.

Some one was sneaking toward them!

CHAPTER XII.

BETTINA IN A GILDED PRISON.

Dick's right hand was on his six-shooter, while his left clutched the throat of Nathan Moser.

"Speak a word, or even breathe aloud, and I will put you out of the world that moment," whispered Dick to his prisoner.

Nathan did not reply. It was his wisest course, under the circumstances.

Dick could not make out who the person was coming along up the slope, with his head bent.

Whoever he might be, it was obvious he did not want to be observed.

He crouched as low as he could, his hands touching the ground from time to time, so that he appeared almost to be on all fours.

"It's one of those scoundrels coming to see what Nathan is doing, I suppose," muttered Dick. "Perhaps the Doctor knew that it was not his voice over the telephone, and has despatched a spy to find out. Well, he will find out more than he anticipates, in all probability."

"Di'mon' Dick," whispered Nathan, in so low a tone that Dick could hardly catch the sound.

"Well?"

"Thet's Hezekiah hisse'f, I think. Don't let him see me hyar, or he'll kill me."

"I'll take care he does not."

"You can't," murmured Nathan, trembling.

"I think I can. Keep quiet!"

The stranger, whoever he might be, was hiding himself as well as he could, by taking advantage of every inequality he came across on his way up the hill, reminding Dick of the Indian method of progress.

"Can it be a Ute?" he thought. "I don't see his feathers, though. An Indian generally wears at least one feather stuck in his hair."

He placed his lips close to Nathan's ear and asked him whether there were any Indians in Doctor's Fleischman's employ.

"Injuns?" exclaimed Nathan, seemingly surprised at the question.

"Yes. Indians," whispered Dick sharply. "You heard what I said. That fellow is crawling toward us like a redskin."

"Waal, an' thet thar is awful troo," acquiesced the other. "He does 'snake along like a Injun. But I never seed one around this place afore. Old Doc Fleischman hates 'em like pizen."

"It is not Hezekiah. I can see that for myself," observed Dick musingly.

"You air 'right thar—plumb right. It shorely ain't Hezekiah, an' I'm plenty glad of it, fer he's a gent whut shoots dreadful straight when he does turn loose."

"I don't know so much about that," thought Dick. "I've known him to miss once or twice. Now I come to see him plainer, he is not an Indian, either."

"Nary Injun."

The stranger approached rapidly, and it was apparent that he was headed straight for the opening in the long barbed-wire fence where Dick and the man he had captured were hiding behind the post.

Dick was ready to fire at any moment, for he held his revolver firmly, the trigger finger prepared for immediate action.

Suddenly Dick leaped to his feet with a cry of recognition, leaving Nathan on the ground.

The stranger also straightened up, and, bounding forward, came through the opening, as Dick threw down the loose wire to make way for him.

At first, he seemed as if about to address the young scout. But he changed his mind, for, catching sight of Nathan Moser trying to glide away, he seized that worthy by the back of the neck with both hands, ejaculating, in a bantering tone:

"Whoa, dere! Don't git too hasty, cull! Stay an' visit wit' us jest a minute, won't youse?"

"Billy Doo!" cried Dick, going to the lad's assistance, and taking Nathan Moser away with a whirl that made the villain's head swim. "I didn't know you till you were nearly here."

Billy Doo chuckled.

"Dat's right, Dick. An' I'm glad my disgoose wuz good enough to fool youse, 'cause den it will be easy ter put it on de eye o' dem guys down in de joint over dere."

"Is Bettina there?" asked Dick hastily.

"Sure she is."

"Is the girl all right?"

"Sure she's all right. She's got a room ter herse'f, all fixed up wit' silk cooshions, an' gold lamps, an' candy in gold boxes, an' t'ings like dat. Den dey's a bed all gold—'cept de covers, in co'se. Dey's silk an' velvet, I should say, f'um wot I c'u'd see, an' dey's soft carpet on de floor, an' a picter o' old Doc Fleischman, in a big gold frame, on de wall, an' mirrors an' stattoos all about."

"Must be handsome, Billy," remarked Dick, unable to repress a smile at the vivid description. "How did you come to see it?"

"De door wuz open, an' I moseyed up dere when I found dat no one wuz keepin' tabs on me. Den I seed ol' Doc lead Bettina in dere, an' tell her she shouldn't want fer nuttin', an' ter keep still an' not try ter open de winder, 'cause it wuz charged wit' 'lectricity."

"The scoundrel!" murmured Dick.

"Den he did somet'in' ter some push-button, or switch, or somet'in', an' dey wuz a big flash o' fire come out o' de winder-shutter, an' he laughed when he seen how skeered she wuz. But he told her it wouldn't hoit her none ef she didn't try ter open de winder. Den he come out an' shet de door, an' I hid behind some curtains in de upper hall."

"Where was the Sarpint all this time?" asked Dick.

"Up de hill, I s'pose. Dere's a cellar in dat house, wit' nuttin' but narrer slits fer winders, an' dat's where dey wanted ter land me."

"How was it they didn't put you down there?"

"'Cause I slipped away f'um dem jest ez we got ter de door, an' dey wuzn't wise, fer dey wuz tellin' each udder dat I'd beat it fer de mountains, an' dey all believed it."

"And where were you?"

"In de house, a-laughin' at dem. Wot made dem t'ink all de more dat I wuz outside wuz de way ol' Tammany behaved. Dat ho'se hez more sense dan all de hold-ups in de kentry, Dick."

"Indeed."

"Sure! When Tam seen me sneak inter de door wit'-out lettin' any o' dem mugs know, he piped off de right t'ing fer him ter do wit'out waitin' a minute. He jest nachally bruk loose f'um de guy wot wuz holdin' him, kicked up his heels, an' went away f'um dere. Dat made

'em all t'ink I wuz callin' ter him or somet'in'. Gee! I'm goin' ter give ol' Tam de best feed o' oats an' corn de foist chancet I gits dat ever he stuck his teet' inter sence he wuz a ho'se."

While Billy was relating his experiences, Dick had been considering what to do with Nathan Moser.

He had determined that he must get into the house and rescue Bettina, but it was not clear to him how he could dispose of his prisoner in the meantime.

On the other hand, he could not delay much longer in going to the house in the guise of Nathan, or there might be suspicions.

"Dick!" whispered Billy Doo eagerly, as he pointed into the gloom toward the mountains.

"Well?"

"I kin see somet'in' movin'. Looks like ho'ses an' men on deir backs. It ain't no more o' dem outlaws, is it?"

Diamond Dick followed the direction of Billy's pointing finger for a moment or two, and then answered coolly:

"No, Billy. Those are not enemies. That first one is Simon Garvin, and I have no doubt that the others are Luke, Judge Clark, and Jack Jolly."

"Dat's who dey must be," agreed Billy, after a short inspection, as the party came nearer. "Shall I go an' meet 'em?"

"Yes. But tell them to come on cautiously. We don't know who may be on the watch."

In less than ten minutes the whole party stood at the fence-post, as they exchanged news of their doings, everybody keeping a sharp eye on Nathan Moser the while.

By Dick's orders, they tied him hand and foot.

The wretched being had about as much chance of escape as a rat surrounded by half a dozen wide-awake dogs.

Diamond Dick laid his plans in as few words as possible.

"You will all stay here," he began, "with the exception of Billy, who will——"

A faint ringing almost under their feet made Judge Clark and Jack Jolly jump aside, as if each had trodden on a nail.

Dick smiled, as he took the telephone-instrument in his hand, and, in the gruff tones of Nathan, responded: "Hello!"

There was a pause, as Dick listened to the message coming from the house, and then he answered aloud:

"I'm comin' right along. I wuzn't quite shore thet ev'rythin' wuz right wi'out I went around some ter see. Now I've come back, an' thar ain't no one in sight. What's thet? No; I ain't seen nothin' o' thet kid nor his white cayuse, nuther. Good-by. I'm comin' right down thar."

"Say, Dick," squeaked Billy Doo. "I wisht youse wouldn't call Tam a cayuse. He's a t'oroughbred, jest ez much ez your Major. It hoits my feelin's when any

one puts it over poor ol' Tam by callin' him a cayuse, or pinto, or any names like dat."

Twenty minutes later, Dick, disguised as Nathan Moser, black mask and all, gave a peculiar rap at one of the side doors of Doctor Fleischman's big house, while Billy Doo lurked in the shadows, a few yards away.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE TIGER'S LAIR.

It was with some little anxiety that Dick waited for a response to his knocking, although he was not worried on his own personal account.

The only fear he had in connection with the possibility of his identity being discovered was that it might prevent the rescue of Bettina.

He knew that he was the only person who had the key to her prison, by possessing the means of entering the house in disguise, and it was essential that he should reach the inside of this strange mansion—for it was a mansion—if the girl was to be delivered.

He knocked three times before any one came, and when at last the door opened he was glad to see that the person inside wore his black mask, because that gave him an excuse for keeping on his own.

"Number?" asked the man inside.

"Number Ten," replied Dick, in a surly growl, having gained considerable information from the real Nathan.

"All right!"

With these two words the other departed into the darkness of a long hall, with a faint light at the other end, leaving Dick to shut the door.

The young marshal would have called Billy to him, only that he feared he might be watched—as he learned afterward actually was the case.

"Hully chee! He's inside!" observed Billy Doo to himself, as the door closed. "I wisht I wuz in wit' him. Hows'ever, he give me de tip ter be ready, an' I reckons I'll have ter obey orders. Hello! Who's dat over dere?"

He ran down toward the river, but some distance from the side of the house, and fairly threw his arms around the neck of his white horse, Tammany, calmly drinking from the stream.

Tammany was glad to meet his master again, as he showed, in his ungainly way, by poking his nose into the boy's face and kicking up his heels, while Billy responded with a slap on the horse's flank that he never would have taken from any one else.

"Dis may be a useful t'ing if Dick gits de goil out in a hurry, an' dey ain't time ter run her up ter de fence where de bunch is waitin'," said Billy to himself, as he led Tammany a little farther from the house. "We kin put her on ol' Tam, an' dey ain't no animile ever c'u'd ketch her."

Billy's belief in his hammer-headed horse was almost pathetic.

Diamond Dick, when he found himself alone in the long, dark hall, made up his mind that boldness was the only thing for him, and he marched to where he had noted the dim light.

He found that there was a goodly-sized apartment, in which were six men dressed like himself, and all of whom he had seen outside during the night as members of Hezekiah Pine's band.

One of them was nursing a disabled leg, carefully bandaged, and Dick recognized the gentleman who carried his bullet.

Hezekiah Pine did not seem to be in the room.

There was not much conversation, for every one was stretched on blankets, either asleep or very near it.

Diamond Dick judged it to be the hour before the dawn, which is generally admitted to be the darkest of the night, and also the coldest.

Dropping on an unoccupied pallet near the door, which he supposed was Nathan's, Dick lay still, thinking of his next move.

He must get up to Bettina's room before daylight, or the chances of taking her away from this place would be remote.

Although there were only half a dozen men in the room where he was, and one of them disabled, Dick knew there were more than a dozen others about the premises.

The reputation of this strange place was well known to most people in that region, and Dick had made himself familiar with the habits of its occupant, as a matter of business.

He was an officer of the law, in his capacity of United States marshal, and, although his official authority would not avail him much in this lawless district, he took care to know all that was going on there, so far as he could.

"My only chance is to get her outside, and let the wagon-train march into Nevada, guarding it closely against attack," he told himself, as he lay on his blankets, blinking through the eye-holes of the black mask.

For ten minutes he lay quiet. Then, believing the others were asleep, including the individual with the injured leg, he got to his feet and stretched his arms, keeping a close watch on his companions.

None of them stirred, and Dick coolly stepped out to the dark hall, listening intently.

No movement occurred in the room he had left, and, like a cat, he stepped lightly up the wide staircase, until he reached the upper hall, which was the same length as that on the ground floor, with two windows, each shrouded by heavy curtains.

Doubtless it was behind one of these curtains that Billy Doo had hidden after peeping into Bettina's golden boudoir.

Dick made a careful examination of the hall before trying to approach Bettina.

At one end was a large door, which he knew led to Doctor Fleischman's study, while next to it was another

that gave into his private sitting-room, where he slept on a sofa when he stayed in the house all night.

The Doctor considered that his home was in the city, and it was there that he always gave his address, for his country-place was understood to be devoted to his experiments in chemistry and electricity, and not to be open to every one.

As for the men who spent their time there, they were supposed to be his assistants in building the strange devices, governed by electricity, which he gave to the world occasionally.

It was understood to be a fad of his that no one should be aware of the identity of these assistants.

Moreover, his experiments often were dangerous, and it is a usual thing for scientific men to wear masks of various kinds—asbestos and what not—to protect their faces, when engaged in researches of an uncertain nature.

Many a valuable life has been saved by the use of an asbestos mask in a laboratory, to say nothing of sight.

So Doctor Nile Fleischman, being a talented scientist, as well as a very wealthy man, was permitted to do what he pleased without any particular comment, especially as, in such a lonely neighborhood, many strange things took place which might have provoked inquiry elsewhere.

Dick went to the door of Doctor Fleischman and listened.

There was a strange rhythmical thumping inside, as if an engine of some kind were working, while heavy footsteps could be made out, as if some one were walking up and down on a thin carpeted floor.

"Experimenting, I suppose. Though it is strange that he should occupy himself in that way when he has as prisoner a girl whom he intends to make his wife to-morrow," muttered Dick.

Then he considered further, and decided that it was not so very strange, after all, since men who are deeply interested in scientific studies seldom can keep away from their beloved experiments for long, no matter what other schemes they may have on hand.

"Perhaps he has something nearly accomplished—or thinks he has—in his laboratory, and, being unable to sleep for excitement, feels that the time might as well be spent in study as anything else."

Reaching this conclusion, Dick went to the door, which he knew, from Billy Doo's description, must be that of Bettina's chamber, and tried the knob gently.

It did not surprise him that he could not open the door; indeed, it would have astonished him if it had yielded.

"She's fastened in, I suppose," he murmured. "There is not even a keyhole. Old Fleischman is too cunning for that. He knows that, given a keyhole, anybody, with the merest fragment of mechanical ability, can insert a piece of wire and turn the lock."

For a few moments Dick cogitated, taking the precaution to slip behind one of the window-curtains, in case any one should happen to come along the hall and see him if he remained in the open.

The hall was not quite dark, for there was a small transom over the door of the laboratory, through the very dirty glass of which streamed a yellow light from the room.

Of course this illumination was hardly worthy of the name, but it relieved what otherwise would have been black darkness.

The chug-chug of the machine, whatever it was, in the

study, continued, and always there was the trampling of feet on the carpeted floor.

"I suppose the best thing to do would be to cut a hole in the panel of her door," said Dick to himself. "Bettina is too sensible to scream or make any other noise, even if she notices it. If once I can manage to speak to her, most of the difficulty will be over."

He had already stepped to the door, bowie-knife in hand, when the creaking of a lock in the study made him dart back to the shelter of the curtain.

He was only just in time, for Doctor Fleischman came out and walked to the other end of the hall, reflectively, his hands behind him.

He had on neither hat nor mask, and it was plain that he was thinking deeply over something that puzzled him.

As he approached the other end of the hall, a sudden thought came to Dick, and like lightning he slipped into the laboratory, and through the arched doorway to the sitting-room, hiding behind the portières that almost filled the arch.

Hardly had Dick found a place in which to secrete himself, in case the doctor saw fit to stroll into the sitting-room, when that learned gentleman returned to his laboratory, closing and locking the door.

"Well, I'm in for it now," muttered Dick, with a feeling of satisfaction that he and the doctor would be only man to man, no matter what might happen.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECRET OF THE BOOKCASE.

Diamond Dick had a set purpose in making his way to Doctor Fleischman's private apartments.

He believed the room occupied by Bettina adjoined Doctor Fleischman's sitting-room.

Peering behind the portière into the doctor's study, Dick saw that there was a curious contrivance of polished wheels and levers, with a heavy mass of iron, bound tightly with red cords, close to it.

The latter machine he knew to be a dynamo, especially when he saw that there were sparks of blue flame emitted perpetually.

In a large glass jar some liquid was boiling, changing its color as it did so, from clear white, to blue, to purple, to orange, and to dark-brown, but always working and bubbling, as if it longed to send the glass flying into a million atoms, so that it might scatter itself all over the room.

The doctor, his hands behind him, stood contemplating the bubbling fluid steadily, as if there were nothing else on his mind.

"Good thing that he can be so wrapped up in his studies," thought Dick. "I'll try what I can do toward reaching Bettina."

On tiptoe he made his way to the wall of the sitting-room, where a large bookcase, packed with books, occupied nearly the whole space.

This did not discourage him, for he had had experience with bookcases too often in his career to take them always for what they seemed to be, and he knew that one may often get to the heart of a mystery by investigating some of the books in a certain way.

The only light in the sitting-room came from the lab-

oratory, filtering between the half-closed portières, but it was enough for his purpose, since it was shed full upon the books in the case.

Dick felt carefully over the backs of the volumes, and a smile flitted over his countenance as his hand rested upon one certain large book on the middle shelf.

"A dummy," he muttered. "Just what I suspected."

He had discovered that one book, at least, was nothing but an empty space, save for the highly ornamented back, heavy with gilding and suggesting much interesting reading within.

Having found out this much, it did not take Diamond Dick very long to get his fingers on a small nail upon the shelf where the book would have rested, had it been a book, instead of a pretense.

There were no books on the whole shelf, except three or four at either end, the intervening space being enclosed as if it were a box with the gilded backs of volumes in front, and a plain wooden partition behind.

Pressing the nail, Dick felt the whole bookcase tremble, and a tug caused it to swing silently outward, disclosing a door in the wall.

"It would be awkward if the doctor were to come in here just now," thought Dick. "More awkward for him than for me, however, for I should surely shoot him dead, no matter what the consequences might be.

He tried the door, but it was tightly shut and fastened. There was no keyhole visible.

He shook the door slightly, as he grasped the handle, and noticed that it was not so heavy as the outer door of what he believed to be the same apartment.

Dick glanced toward the study, but Doctor Fleischman was in the same attitude, his hands behind him, gazing at the dynamo and bubbling liquid, as if he were entranced. He heard nothing but the chugging dynamo, and saw nothing but the boiling liquid.

"Desperate situations demand desperate remedies," muttered Dick. "Here goes."

With the sharp point of his heavy bowie-knife, he attacked the panel of the door separating him from the girl's room, and soon had a hole large enough for him to speak through.

Placing his lips to the orifice, he said, in a whisper:

"Bettina!"

"Dick!" she responded, her voice trembling with joy.

"Hush! Don't speak my name. Can you open this door?"

"Yes. But—where is that awful doctor?"

"Never mind. I'll attend to him. Open the door," said Dick.

There was the low grating of a bolt at the bottom of the door, and another at the top. Then the door opened.

Dick stepped into the gilded room described so graphically by Billy Doo, pulling the bookcase into place as he did so.

"I knew you would come," were the first low words of the girl, as the opening was hidden by the swinging shelves.

"I intended to come, if I could," smiled Dick. "But it was anything but clear to me how that was to be accomplished. Billy Doo told me where you were, but if Doctor Fleischman had not kindly made a road for me by walking out to the hallway to think, because the room was not big enough for all of his cogitations, I am thinking I should still be trying to get that other door of yours open."

He pointed to the portal leading to the hallway, and Bettina shook her head doubtfully.

"It is very thick and heavy, and it would have taken a long while to get it open," she said. "But how are we to get out? I am afraid of that man. He declares he will marry me to-morrow, and that there will be no opportunity for me to break away after that."

Dick went to one of the windows, threw open the casement, and attacked the iron-lined wooden shutter.

As he half-expected, he received an electric shock that hurled him backward to the middle of the apartment.

"The doctor would hardly neglect such a simple precaution as that," he said to himself. "He is too familiar with the use of electric currents not to guard the shutters with one."

If Dick had had time, he would undoubtedly have discovered how the current had been applied to the iron of the shutter, and have found a means of rendering it harmless.

But it would be daylight in about half an hour, and it was incumbent on him to do something quickly, if he meant to get Bettina out of the toils of the strange individual bending over his dynamo and boiling fluid in the adjoining room.

Dick had his revolver, as well as his bowie-knife, but he could not use a firearm while so many of the willing creatures of Doctor Fleischman were in the house, ready to fly to his aid.

Looking about the handsome room, which was as luxurious as Billy Doo had described, the scout sought some weapon that could be used in case of coming to close quarters with the doctor.

He saw, in the brass fender of the open fireplace, a heavy poker of the same metal, which looked business-like.

"Could you swing this implement, if occasion required, Bettina?" he asked, as he placed the poker in her hand.

She twirled it about almost as skilfully as a fencing-master would flourish a rapier.

"I can do anything with this, I think, Dick," she answered. "I did so many things on the farm, including thrashing out grain with an old-fashioned flail, that I am sure I could give a good account of myself with a trifle like this poker."

"If you have used a flail without knocking yourself down with it, I am sure you could," laughed Dick. "The old-time article for thrashing, before the introduction of thrashing-machines, was one of the most awkward contrivances that man ever made, I do believe."

For the benefit of those who may never have seen a flail, it is composed of two heavy clubs, or pieces of scantling, each about three feet in length, which are joined by a piece of leather.

Taking one of these sticks in your hand, you swing the loose one, bringing it down with a thump upon the wheat or oats, and knock out the grain.

The novice is pretty sure to crack himself on the head with the loose end of the flail many times before he learns the round-arm swing which is acquired by long practise.

Dick had used a flail occasionally, and was familiar with it, so that he judged rightly that if the girl could give a good account of herself with one, she would not be overweighted by a brass poker.

"What did Doctor Fleischman tell you when he put

you in this room?" asked Dick, as he stood in the center and admired the rich furnishings and decorations.

"He said I must stay here until to-morrow afternoon, and then he would come in and talk to me about the wedding, meaning that it would take place about that time. My bedroom is in that little room over there."

She lifted a pair of portières and showed him the bedroom, which was as luxurious as the sitting-room.

"Well, we shall have to interfere with his kind intentions, I am afraid, Bettina," observed Dick, as he opened the door behind the bookcase in the doctor's apartments.

"What shall I do now, Dick?" she whispered.

"Turn out all the lights in the room," was his answer.

She turned a switch, and all the electric lamps went out, leaving only the red glow of the dying fire in the grate to relieve the gloom.

Cautiously Dick pressed the brass nail in the bookcase, which he could get at easily from where he stood, and the clumsy affair moved slowly outward.

Doctor Feischman still gazed steadfastly at his boiling chemicals, oblivious of everything else.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK FOOLS THEM ALL.

Dick could not help wondering at the absorption of the chemist in his studies when he knew that he was threatened by avengers who would spare no effort to rescue the girl he had made prisoner.

"I can only suppose that he considers himself so well guarded in this house that he can afford to leave the details to others," thought Dick. "Besides, a student—and that he certainly is, with all his wickedness—generally regards his researches in the realms of science or philosophy as more important than anything else."

"What are we going to do, Dick?" whispered the girl. "Get out of this."

The confidence expressed in Dick's terse reply extended itself to her, and she smiled as her companion, taking her hand, drew her into the room and pushed the bookcase back into place.

They were in for it now, and Bettina grasped her poker with a determined hand, as they hid behind one of the portières between the two apartments.

Dick wanted a few moments to consider how to proceed.

That he could hope to get the girl out of the laboratory without attracting the attention of the doctor seemed hopeless, almost, but Dick meant to do that if there was any way at all in which it might be accomplished.

As he stood behind the curtain, peeping at the unconscious rascal who was as in a day-dream over his apparatus, Dick stretched his arms, to relieve a slight cramp, when his hand came in contact with a small gong, in a corner, over his head.

"Here's a bell," he whispered.

"That is the bell connecting with my rooms," said the girl. "I was instructed to press a button if I needed anything."

"Did you ever use it?"

"Once, when I demanded that he should let me out, thinking that if I had an opportunity to talk to him even there might be some loophole of escape."

"Did the bell make much noise?"

"Yes. It is very loud."

Dick considered for a moment, and then, with his pen-knife, manipulated the wires near to the gong so that the electric circuit was closed.

Instantly the bell began to clang as if it were bewitched, so loudly that the girl involuntarily clapped one hand over her ear, and would have put up the other hand also, only that it held the poker.

Dick held her close inside the curtain.

At the first sound of the bell Doctor Fleischman seemed to awake from his reverie, and then, in the next instant, he had swept through the archway and was fumbling at the bookcase.

Dick put his hand to the wires and stopped the ringing, arguing that the girl would not be likely to keep her hand on the push-button indefinitely, and that there was no need for a continuance of the alarm now that it had called the doctor to the other room.

In coming through the bookcase, Dick had pushed the brass nail a little out of place with the point of his bowie, so that it should not be easy for any one to open the hidden portal.

He wished he had not done so now, for it was keeping the doctor in the room when he might have passed through to Bettina's apartments.

"Come on, Bettina!" he whispered, as he slipped cautiously behind the curtains to the laboratory, just as Doctor Fleischman managed to swing the bookcase aside and dart through the door to the gilded boudoir.

Reaching the outer door of the laboratory, Dick tried to open it, after shooting back two of the bolts.

But that was not enough. There was still the lock, and the key was not there!

"Stand still, Bettina!" he told her, in a low tone.

"Very well!"

"But keep your poker ready."

"It is ready."

Dick smiled approvingly, for Bettina was as cool as if in the wagon, taking supper with her father and Aunt Tilly.

Where was the key? Dick could not answer the question, but he much feared it was somewhere about the person of Doctor Fleischman; but, discovering it on the table, he soon had it in his possession.

He had reached the door, and was in the very act of inserting the key, when a cry from Bettina made him turn.

Doctor Fleischman was standing near the table, glaring at him with the ferocity of an irritated cobra.

"Hello, doctor!" cried Dick cheerfully, as he continued to force the key into the lock.

The scowl on the scoundrel's face changed to a leer of malignant triumph, as he replied, in a mild tone which was more menacing than if he had thundered the words:

"Good morning!"

"Good morning to you, doctor. We are going out for a little fresh air, if you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" asked the doctor, fumbling at his table, while the fluid in the glass vessel bubbled up more fiercely than ever, as the dynamo continued its chugging. "Go out for some fresh air, by all means. You are taking the lady with you, I see."

"Yes. She finds it a little close in the house. We are going to take a walk first, and then ride to Nevada."

Bettina, balancing her brass poker, could not understand this badinage, but she feared the doctor had some sinister intention which would mean their undoing, if she read his expression aright.

"You do not anticipate any difficulty in opening that door, do you, Diamond Dick?" asked Doctor Fleischman, still in those mild tones which threatened so much.

"No. Although it is a little awkward," responded Dick.

"Ah!"

"The lock needs oil, I think," was Dick's next remark.

As he spoke, he managed to get the key fairly into place, and, with a quick turn, he had shot back the bolt and thrown the door open.

Just as he did so, there was a flash of blue fire from the lock, and Bettina, whose hand had been on the door, fell, with a slight cry, into the arms of Dick, unconscious.

Doctor Fleischman gave utterance to a laugh, as he kept his finger in a certain position on the table.

Dick understood immediately that there was an electric connection with the door, and that the doctor had turned on the current in the hope of catching the young marshal.

"Bettina!" whispered Dick.

The girl gave signs of coming to herself, but, picking her up in his arms, Dick darted down the dim corridor toward the staircase.

"Stop them!" roared Doctor Fleischman, as he sped along the hallway after them.

"Confound that fellow! He will alarm the whole house," muttered Dick. "I shall have to make him hold his tongue."

Just as the doctor caught Dick, near the top of the stairs, the scout dropped his fair burden upon the floor, and, drawing back his left fist for a good stroke, let fly at the scoundrelly scientist, catching him in the chest and sending him spinning half the length of the corridor.

"Now, Bettina! Hurry!" whispered Dick, seeing that she had practically recovered.

He took her by the hand, and they ran down the stairs—plump into the arms of Hezekiah Pine!

"Hello! What's this?" demanded Hezekiah, who, in the dim light, supposed Dick was one of the band of rascals, especially as he still wore the black mask.

"Go up-stairs and see ther doc," growled Dick, imitating Nathan Moser's harsh tones. "He's hurt hisself."

"How?"

"I dunno. I seen him fall back'ard jest ez I came along wi' this hyar girl. He gi' me orders ter git her outside, an' rush her over ter town."

"Why?" asked Hezekiah suspiciously.

"How sh'u'd I know? Ther boss don't tek me inter his confidence. I kin on'y obey orders," replied Dick, more gruffly than before. "Go up an' see him, an' let me do whut he says, afore he gits mad an' bats me over ther head wi' his gun."

Diamond Dick's seeming impatience and fear of the vengeance of Doctor Fleischman if he did not at once do what he had been told deceived Hezekiah, and he began to ascend the stairs.

"Now for the door, Bettina!"

There had been several of the masked men listening to the dialogue between him and Hezekiah, but, as everything seemed straight, they did not attempt to interfere

with Dick, who reached the outer door and swung it wide open, practically all in one movement.

As he did so, Doctor Fleischman regained his voice, after the thump from Dick's fist, and roared frantically:

"Stop him! Don't let them get away!"

But Dick was already outside, with the girl, and he slammed the door behind them, as he raised his voice in a long howl, like the cry of a hungry coyote.

It was his signal to Billy Doo that he wanted aid.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE VENGEANCE WAS WORKED.

"This way, Bettina!" cried Dick, as he ran the girl toward the river, whence had come an answering signal like his own.

Darting through the gloom, he was stopped by the sudden appearance of several men whose general cut did not suggest the Destroying Angels.

With his right hand on the pistol in its holster, Dick waited for an attack.

Bettina still held her brass poker, and it was with a thrill of satisfaction that the scout saw how thoroughly he could depend on the girl to assist if there should be a fight.

But it was not more than a few seconds before Dick made out the identity of the strangers, and, with a shout of "Hello, Simon! Luke! Hello, is that you, Judge Clark?" he rushed forward.

The girl was in her father's arms before Dick would have thought it possible for her to get there, while the others indulged in an Indian war-dance, expressive of joy.

"Look out, Dick! Dey's onter youse!"

It was Billy Doo shouting almost into Dick's ear, as he took his station by the side of his pard, and pointed to where a dozen masked men were coming toward them from the house.

"Now, Billy! Bluff will go here! Understand?" whispered Dick hurriedly. "You fire your pistol in the direction of the road leading up to the fence-post where the telephone is. I will join the rascals, and see if I can git my hands on that doctor. I want to make him a prisoner and carry him along to the wilderness between here and the mines in Nevada, just for my own satisfaction."

"Dat's right, Dick!" responded Billy. "Youse is all ter de glowin' hot coals!"

As he spoke, the lad fired three shots up the hill, as if in pursuit of the men who had taken Bettina from Dick.

It was a ruse that deceived all the masked men except one.

As his comrades dashed up the slope in the direction of the fence-posts and barbed wire where the telephone had been used to such good effect by Dick earlier in the night, the one who did not follow the rest turned on Dick and tore the mask from his face.

"Diamond Dick, eh?" he snarled.

Dick, in turn, snatched the mask from his assailant's countenance, at the same time forcing him backward by a powerful grasp on the sinewy throat.

"Hezekiah Pine!" shouted Dick. "I knew it! Get back into that house, and stay there, or, as sure as I am here,

"I'll kill you before you can count five! We have Bettina, and we are going to keep her. Moreover, we have your place surrounded by men who shoot straight. That emigrant-train was not unprotected, if you thought it was."

It was a bluff, as Dick had said to Billy Doo, but, judging by the rapidity with which Hezekiah made for the house, it would be effective.

Dick was covering the rascal with his Colt, and Hezekiah knew it, or he might have tried to get at his own weapon.

Meanwhile, Doctor Fleischman was shouting contradictory orders within the house, so that Hezekiah would not have known what to do if Dick had not settled his uncertainty by compelling him to go inside.

Dick's idea was to get Hezekiah, Doctor Fleischman, and the fellow whose disabled leg, from the scout's own shot, kept him out of the fray, while Simon and the others carried Bettina too far away for there to be any danger of immediate recapture.

The day was breaking, and Dick knew that in the daylight the ruffians would not dare attack the wagons, now that every man with them was prepared, with Winchesters and six-shooters, and practically unlimited ammunition, to repel any foe.

Billy Doo was close by, waiting till Dick should give him instructions, and incidentally wondering what had become of Handsome Harry.

"Billy!" called Dick.

"Hello! Wot?" responded Billy.

But before Dick could say another word there was a roar and a thunderous crash, which threw both Dick and Billy flat upon their faces.

The house had blown up!

Something had exploded within, and what had been a handsome country residence just before was in a few moments converted into a shapeless mass of brick and blazing timbers, with a fierce fire devouring all that was left to tell what it once had been.

Dick ran to the river, whence he could see that a number of smaller explosions were taking place, as the fire reached various chemicals used by Doctor Fleischman in his studies.

"Wot is it, Dick?"

Billy Doo, unhurt, but decidedly shaken as to his nerves by the unlooked-for catastrophe, was close to him.

"Doctor Fleischman has died in his laboratory, and his villainies are all over, Billy," answered Dick solemnly.

"Wow! Whar's my pard? Bring him out, or, by ther great horn spoon, I'll t'ar up ther hull kentry! Wow! I'm ther howlin' grizzly o' Murder Mountains, an' I'm achin' ter chaw up ther black-faced mavericks ez hev blowed up my pard! Wough-h-h-h-h!"

"Aw! Back up, Sarp!" squeaked Billy Doo. "Whar air youse?"

"Wow! Is thet you, Billy?"

Handsome Harry, on his roan horse, came galloping into the circle of light cast by the blazing ruins, and, jumping to the ground, threw his arms around Dick and fairly hugged him.

"Where did you come from, Sarpint?"

"Up ther hill, whar I wuz waitin' fer you. Then I heerd this explosion, an' I wuz half-afear'd thet you mought be in it, though I never reely believed ez yer would allow yerse'f ter be caught thet way. Whar's ther gal?"

"Safe with her father," replied Dick.

"An' thet thar Doctor Fleischman an' Hezekiah Pine? Whar air they, do yer s'pose, Dick?"

The young plainsman pointed to the ruins, where the flames rose higher and higher toward the heavens.

* * * * *

Nothing was ever recovered of the bodies of Doctor Fleischman, Hezekiah Pine, or the man with the disabled leg. It was supposed that they were all killed in the first explosion and then burned to ashes.

The members of the band who had run up the hill, seeking to bring back Bettina, took fright when the house blew up, and, removing their masks, made their way, by ones, twos, and threes, to their retreat in the mountains.

As for Nathan Moser, Dick decided he was insignificant enough to be allowed to go.

In due time the wagon-train formed again, and the vehicles, with their occupants, reached the mining-district for which they had been bound when they left far-away Michigan.

Diamond Dick and his two pards, Billy Doo and Handsome Harry, went twenty miles or so with the wagon-train, until there was no danger of molestation from any other rascals.

Indeed, with the destruction of Doctor Fleischman and Hezekiah Pine, the peril had passed, for there was not enough money in all the wagons to tempt thieves, especially when they knew they would have Diamond Dick leading the force against them.

It was among the mountains of Nevada, after seeing a long line of wagons winding their way westward, that Dick said good-by to his two pards, ere they returned to Lane Dog, while he bent his horse's steps the other way.

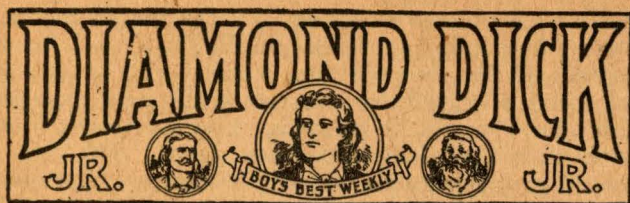
"Waal, Dick, ef yer goin' up toward Vancouver, I hope yer won't fergit ter come back soon," said Handsome Harry, shaking his hand.

"Dat's wot I say," added Billy Doo, shaking Dick's hand in his turn. "We air goin' ter miss yer, Dick, especially if youse is goin' up dere inter Canady."

"That's where I expect to go," answered Dick. "However, it will not be for long. One thing is certain, and that is that I sha'n't soon forget the excitement we three have just passed through together, in saving that girl from a horrible fate, by accomplishing The Defeat of the Destroying Angels."

THE END.

Diamond Dick went up to Vancouver, as he had told his old friends he intended. He met with some startling adventures on the way, too. What they were you will learn when you read No. 599, "Diamond Dick's Master-Stroke; or, The Unmasking of Seattle Sim." This splendid story will be published next week. It deals with new scenes and characters, and the dashing young Western hero finds a call upon all his nerve and strength to carry him through in his determination to punish a rascal. There was a plot among some of the ruffians who hang about in the dark places of cities everywhere, East as well as North, to take possession unlawfully of a large sum of money which was as carefully guarded as seemed possible. The men who resolved to steal it put into operation a daring scheme, and it is doubtful whether any one but Diamond Dick could have frustrated their designs. How he did it you will learn when you read this thrilling tale. It is well named, indeed, "Diamond Dick's Master-stroke."



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STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

DIVERS' THRILLING EXPERIENCES.

Not for the rich spoils of a wreck did Diver Leverett, whose pluck has entitled him to a place among the world's heroes, risk his life in the English Channel recently. A comrade's life was in danger. While working in twenty-five fathoms of water the latter's air-pipe and breast-line became entangled. To stay at such a depth under water for more than half an hour was to court death. And yet Leverett, in his anxiety to release his comrade, went down and remained below for two hours, ultimately bringing his mate to the surface, but not until he himself was completely exhausted. Unfortunately the sequel to this splendid feat of heroism was a somewhat sad one; for Trapnell, the rescued diver, who had been five and a half hours in the water, succumbed to the shock a day or two later. No better example, however, of the pluck and comradeship which exist between men engaged in this dangerous calling could be found than that furnished by Leverett's bravery.

To Captain Mattson, of the Swedish barque *Flora*, all credit is due for his ingenuity and courage. While in the Bay of Biscay the vessel sprang a leak, necessitating repairs from the outside. This the skipper successfully undertook, clothed in an improvised diving-suit, consisting of a large bag, sixteen feet long and two feet in diameter, made of sail-cloth. This, which was kept in shape by metal rings and provided with arm-holes, sleeves, and a small window, was with its occupant lowered over the vessel's side. The gallant captain soon located the damage, and, despite the proximity of a shark and the fact that he narrowly escaped drowning by the inrush of water through a small hole, accomplished his hazardous task in workmanlike fashion.

The dramatic episode in Victor Hugo's romance, "The Toilers of the Sea," was reenacted in real life when a diver named Palmer, in the employ of the Cape Town Harbor

Board, descended to a depth of thirty-five feet to examine into the damage done by the *Dunvegan Castle* when she collided with the South Arm Pier. The water was clear, and the diver thought to proceed with his work under favorable conditions, when, suddenly, from behind a dislodged block of concrete shot a hideous tentacle that caught him by the leg. The next moment his arm was gripped, and an octopus, emerging from its lurking-place, flung its other feelers around its luckless victim, who, having no knife, was at the mercy of his pitiless assailant. Fortunately, Palmer kept his presence of mind; he pulled the signal-cord, and his comrades above commenced to haul him up. Slowly he rose to the surface, whence he emerged with the sea-monster still enfolding him in its gruesome embrace. Relief, in the form of knife and axe, was promptly at hand, and the creature was cut and chopped from its prey. When subsequently measured it was found to be nearly twelve feet across.

An equally formidable foe is, the shark, which is so much dreaded by divers in the southern seas that few will work save within the bars of an iron cage. Lambert, the diver, when engaged off the island of Diego Garcia upon a coal hulk that had been fouled by a steamer, disdained such protection, and might have fallen a victim to his temerity.

When first he descended he was approached by a large shark, curious to inspect the invader of his domains. By opening the escape-valve in his helmet, and allowing some air to rush out, Lambert scared the creature away. Next day, however, it returned, and despite temporary repulses by the diver executing the same maneuver with his helmet, continued its visits with such regularity that Lambert resolved to have recourse to more drastic measures.

On the occasion therefore of the creature's next visit, he signaled for a sheath-knife and a looped rope. Using his bare hand as a bait, he made the shark turn on its back, when he attacked it with his knife, inflicting several severe wounds. Then, passing the noose of his rope over the fish's body, he signalled for it to be hauled up. As a trophy of his prowess Lambert brought home the shark's backbone.

A diver named Bardi missed a valuable dagger which had been given to him, and was, therefore, highly prized. Some years later, when his loss was well-nigh forgotten, he was at work off the Italian coast on a sunken vessel. His labor was gruesome in the extreme, for the bodies of those who had been drowned remained below. In the cabin he came upon two corpses locked in an embrace of direst hate. One was that of his brother—of whom he had heard nothing for many years—the other that of a woman, in whose breast was buried the blade of his long-lost dagger, whereof the hilt was hidden in her murderer's rigid grasp.

On September 22, 1842, two divers, named Jones and Girvan, between whom there had been some ill-feeling, were at work together on the wreck of the *Royal George*, which foundered off Portsmouth in 1782, when Girvan, who was a very powerful man, made a sudden attack upon his mate. The latter endeavored to escape, but the other, seizing him by the leg, frustrated the attempt.

Desperately did Jones struggle, and at last, with a frantic kick, broke the lens of Girvan's helmet. Through the crack rushed the water, and Girvan, now himself in sore straits, pulled the signal-cord. His call was promptly answered, but

only just in time, for he was at death's door when hauled up. Three days, however, in Haslar Hospital completely restored him, and the two submarine duellists subsequently worked together in the greatest harmony.

THE REWARD OF PATIENCE.

A tollgate-keeper at Wytham, near Oxford, England, has some strange pets, which he exhibits. He places a piece of bread on the toe of his boot and whistles in a peculiar way. Instantly a dozen or more wild rats emerge from the bushes, eat the bread, and at another whistle go back to their holes. The man places a piece of bread on his shoulder, whistles again, and this time numerous sparrows and finches appear. The gatekeeper says that the obedience of his feathered and furry pets is solely due to patience and kindness.

A Night's Adventure in Japan.

BY THEO. D. C. MILLER.

The first gray streaks of dawn called us from the rude couch on which we had passed an almost wretched night's repose, and after a hasty toilet, one far better than most of the Japanese hotels can afford, we assembled in the dining-room to partake of the scanty repast so uninvitingly spread out before us. There were but five in our little company, and we had traveled thousands of miles—even crossed the deep blue sea, to witness the land that had but recently permitted foreigners to visit those classic shores.

Our repast being finished, we ordered the groom to bring our horses to the door, and in a few moments our fiery steeds were gayly cantering along the highway leading to Kangawha. It was a beautiful morning; the sun was smiling with all its Oriental loveliness; the flowers were scattering their sweetest perfume to the passing breezes; the fairy, sparkling brooks were leaping and foaming in their onward course to the sea; the stately forest trees were casting their inviting shadows around; the playful lambs were sporting with their dams, and the tuneful feathered warblers were caroling their most bewitching melodies. It was, indeed, one of the most delightful scenes we had ever witnessed, and many and loud were the exclamations of praise we bestowed upon the inspiring landscape.

As we rode leisurely along, our guide, who was one of the most intelligent natives with whom we chanced to meet, related many incidents of the country, and we took great delight in listening to various tales. He would tell of horrible outrages perpetrated upon unsuspecting travelers by the mountain robbers, who, he declared, were of vast numbers, and everywhere present; the thieves had spies infesting all localities, obtaining various kinds of information for their unprincipled and daring chieftain, who was another Claude Duval in his various escapes from the stern arm of justice. He was greatly feared by the honest Japanese; having, at various times, captured high officials, and either put them to death by the most cruel torture, or kept them in durance vile

until the government would pay a large ransom for their release; thus bringing the government into an acknowledgment of the power of those villains who secretly infest the dark, cavernous recesses of the long mountain chain that, like a huge anaconda, stars the beautiful and fertile valleys of long-imprisoned Japan, and lends a ten-fold grandeur to its majestic loveliness. The many country roughs held clandestine meetings with this noted robber, and it was broadly hinted that many large sums of gold they received for the secret information they conveyed to the blood-thirsty scoundrels, who feared no law, neither hesitated to commit any crime, however cruel and barbarous it might be.

We jogged along in a pleasant mood, laughing at various incidents; but, at times, the horrid tales related by our guide would cause our imaginations some little uneasiness; however, we were inclined to treat his not overpleasant yarns as somewhat exaggerated. Still, his honest-looking countenance, and the rather solemn style in which he related the terrible adventures of the mountain brigands, seemed to stamp our guide as a truthful man.

The day passed pleasantly away, and the scenery was so delightful that none of our pleasure-party thought of returning to Kangawha—we having left the main road to visit some of the celebrated mountain passes, situated beside the sparkling Laswanna, and now being far beyond our place of destination, as the guide informed us—until the shades of night began to settle over the earth, shutting out the Oriental light of day, and closing the busy din of labor. Then we longed for the quiet inn's retreat, so, turning our steeds in the opposite direction, we were soon sauntering merrily along.

By the advice of our guide, we took the cross-road leading through the gloomy pass of the lofty Kagosima, it being the nearest way to reach the city of our destination. Without a dissenting voice, we turned into the dark lane, and silently pursued our way. The moon shed her pale light upon the lonesome scenery, and the twinkling stars came forth in smiling grandeur, their glancing loveliness almost dispelling the gloomy thoughts that were harassing our souls. Oh! the deep, heartfelt loneliness of that moment pen cannot portray.

At length we reached the dim shadows of the haughty Kagosima, and my heart almost stopped beating as I beheld its solemn grandeur, its awful gloom, so harmoniously, yet painfully, intermingled. It seemed as though we were entering the valley of death; yet with all its uninviting gloom there seemed to be an equal portion of alluring light—a something leading into this mysterious cavern.

"What a horrid place!" I ejaculated in one breath: "yet how resplendant!" my next exclamation would be.

I never before had experienced the feeling that then possessed me; the dark, gloomy thoughts; the bright, alluring prospects. With a shudder one moment, and an exclamation of delight the next, we entered the lone bridle-path leading through the dismal vale, and saw no more pale Luna's refreshing light, or the bright, gushing rays of the beautiful stars—those orbs that had so sweetly lightened our night's journey over hill and through vale.

We had penetrated to the center of this solemn pass, and were fording a rippling stream that flowed in unequaled grandeur along the pebbled dell, when a strange sound fell upon our ears, causing us all to check our

steeds, and listen with amazement. Our guide, who, for the past, had been as solemn as a newly hooded monk, knew the meaning of that mysterious sound, and his blanched cheeks and sunken eyeballs told us that fear had taken possession of his soul. His face was as white as the pure, virgin snow, and the beating of his heart could be distinctly heard by his no less fearing followers. In a voice choked with fear and emotion he cried:

"The bandit! the bandit! Oh, the blood-thirsty robbers of the Kagosima are upon us, and no living man ever escapes from their cruel grasp, unless he gives them his whole fortune as a ransom!"

"Peace!" shouted one of our number, who had almost laughingly witnessed the native's fear and trembling; "be still, and let us reason the matter. In short, is there no means of escape?"

"None that I know of," replied the guide. "These robbers have fiery steeds, and should we turn our backs to them and attempt to escape, they would, in the end, overtake us, and then our doom is sealed. There is no steed but my own that can outfly those of the bandit, so it would be useless to attempt to escape. But if we are captured now, with no friends having the means to ransom us, death, in lingering torment, will surely be our lot. But, friends, if it meets your approbation, I will take what money you possess, make my escape, get assistance, come back, and procure your ransom, or fight for your freedom. What do you say?"

Being in a fix, and not liking to make a bad matter worse, we quickly consented, and, giving him our money, we hurried him off, with many a wish for his speedy return.

He had hardly passed from sight when again the mysterious sound was heard, and shortly after a score of men, with gleaming blades, sprang from the thicket and surrounded us. We had scarcely time to breathe a simple prayer when our bridles were rudely seized, and we were rapidly borne over rocky cliffs and through tangled underbrush. How long we were compelled to continue this dreary march I know not; but finally a halt was ordered, and we were taken from our steeds, each by two strong men, and conveyed into a strong, dark cave, where we were securely imprisoned, not knowing, but secretly dreading the horrid doom that awaited us.

Toward morning, Latong Chaomina, the chieftain, a dark-browed, villainous-looking man, made his appearance, and as his dark, evil eye fell upon me, I nervously shrank away from his gaze. He was followed by two desperate-looking characters, who strode into the room amid brutal oaths of the most fiendish kind.

"Search the Christian dogs, my men!" said the fiery chieftain, brutally striking one of our number with a cane he carried. "And look ye, foreigners, if one word escapes your lips, death, tormenting death shall be your portion! Quickly, men! obey your chieftain's orders; and one-half of the gold you find concealed upon the persons of the foreign dogs shall be your portion."

With a fiendish laugh the chieftain sat down, while his rough companions began to search our pockets for the expected gold. But vain their efforts, for not a penny could be found. Their wrath was kindled, and Chaomina savagely swore that unless a large sum was speedily paid for our ransom, the dark glen would soon contain our lifeless bodies. With another fiendish laugh our captors went away, and we were left in happy solitude.

Hunger at length began to sway its stern scepter over

us, and our yearning for food was almost unbearable. But no food was given us, and thus, in the agony of hunger, the hours passed slowly away.

Again the chief visited us, and again we were compelled to listen to his savage threats—threats that would almost still the beatings of our very hearts. Once more he went away, and left us to our own bitter, agonizing reflections.

Oh, how painfully the moments passed away! how anxiously we longed for our guide's return with the promised ransom, or the expected aid. But hours passed, and he came not. Must we pass another lonely night within this dreary prison? was the thought of each heart, as we shuddered with fear. Oh, heartrending thought! most painful in the extreme.

We could hear the din and confusion made by the carousing robbers as they were preparing for their bloody work; and we groaned in anguish, little believing that we should ever enter the home of civilization, or behold loved friends again.

Time continued, and we fell into an uneasy slumber, from which we were suddenly awakened by the sound of voices within our room. Upon opening our eyes we beheld the grim countenance of Chaomina, and, behind him, but a few paces, the pleasant, well-known features of our guide. Then we should be saved at last! Oh, happy thought! And it was almost impossible to refrain from crying with joy at the expectation of such unmistakable bliss. But we were finally aroused at the great, important interview pending that moment. The guide was parleying for our ransom—vainly interceding for our release.

"I have given you my final answer," said the chief, in answer to our guide's pleading; "the sum is announced, and I will not accept one cent less. You must bring me five thousand dollars before to-morrow's meridian, or their lifeless forms will be thrown down yon precipice, a prey to the wild forest denizens."

Then we felt that liberty was not for us; for the united sums of money that we had given the guide would not procure the ransom of one-half our number; and it was with a bleeding heart that we saw our friend depart, without even recognizing us. We thought that all was over—death would surely be our lot.

A painful and sorrowing hour was passed in tearful prayers, and our feelings were getting somewhat calmed, when a crashing sound was heard, followed by the loud discharges of muskets, rifles, and revolvers. Deathlike groans followed; then all was confusion, tumult, uproar. We listened in breathless anxiety as the moments passed; and our hearts leaped with joy when the door was burst open, and our guide rushed in, followed by a score of his countrymen.

"My friends, you are saved!" said he, as he ran to embrace us.

And we praised the noble fellow who had befriended us.

"Come!" said he; "you are now at liberty—let us go!"

And as we passed out of that dreary cave we saw the bodies of the bandits strewn thickly around, while to our eager questions the guide informed us that all of the band had perished.

Thus Latong Chaomina and his cruel bravos had met the fate they so richly deserved.

We reached Kangawha without any further incidents of interest transpiring.

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